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The Work Relationships of University Professional Services Staff

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The Work Relationships of University Professional Services Staff

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ABSTRACT

In an era of increasing complexity and competition, it is essential that universities make effective use of their resources and that staff work collaboratively to address the significant challenges their institutions face. Despite making up more than half the UK university workforce, the role of support services staff receives limited attention in the academic literature. Through a study of the work relationships of university professional services staff, this thesis extends service research and relationship quality literature to develop a deeper understanding of the interpersonal and organisational dynamics of support staff relationships and their contribution to institutional performance. Drawing on theories of relationship quality, trust and social exchange, a conceptual framework provides the basis for the empirical study and theorises the internal service exchange relationship from the point of view of the internal customer and their expectations, experience and outcomes of service engagement. The methodological approach used in this research derives from an interpretivist perspective (e.g. Cresswell 2007). Qualitative research data was gathered through fifty individual semi-structured interviews with participants across three institutions in the UK Midlands region. Findings reveal that internal service quality influences the quality of service universities provide to their external customers, through effects on performance, productivity, co-operation and staff motivation, with both individual and institutional consequences. Organisational context influences how relationships are framed, and shared understandings, common values and mutual interests are the bedrock of effective co-operation between colleagues. Professional services staff are strongly valued when they bring specialist expertise, help reduce administrative and bureaucratic burdens, and use their initiative and problem-solving skills to take responsibility for delivering desired outcomes in partnership with their customers. By combining relationship quality theory with the service perspective, this thesis contributes new knowledge about the dimensions of internal service quality and the dynamics, value and outcomes of relationship quality in internal service exchange.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Positioning of the research

Universities are complex, dynamic, interdependent and highly relational organisations, where the successful production of knowledge and education is highly dependent on individuals and the ways in which they work together and across the constituent parts of the university (Shattock 2010). An institution's success is contingent on the effective management of resources, its prime resource being its staff and their ability to respond to changing external pressures (Whitchurch and Gordon 2013; Kok and McDonald 2017). Challenges in the Higher Education (HE) sector demand that universities deploy all their available resources effectively in order to be able to respond to changing circumstances, adapt to new imperatives and operate in an increasingly competitive environment (Burnes, Wend and By 2014). The day-to-day functioning of a university relies on effective co-ordination of these resources through collaboration between individuals and teams, with interpersonal relationships as central to co-operation and knowledge creation (Jones and George 1998). One of the key assets of a university which contributes to the effective day-to-day operation of the university is the body of support staff it employs (Graham 2010).

In universities in England, 51% of all staff are non-academic staff, providing support services to their academic colleagues and students as well as to their institution (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2017). Using a theatrical analogy, non-academic staff can be viewed as the 'behind-the scenes' stage crew, providing vital assistance to enable the 'main act' (the academy) to perform. All parties understand that the main act is the draw for the audience, but that it is only by everyone playing their part that the play is a success. Staff who are 'behind-the-scenes' are invisible to the audience but their contribution is essential. This arrangement works well unless being out of sight leads to being undervalued or unappreciated (Szekeres 2004). The role of support staff in universities has had limited consideration in higher education research, and there is scant empirical evidence for university leaders to draw on when developing strategies for the effective deployment of this vital resource. It is this situation which has provided the motivation for undertaking the research presented in this thesis.

Whilst academic freedom and autonomy of academic staff is a long-held principle and expectation in universities (Nickson 2014; Shattock 2017), there is less recognition that

professional services staff in universities can also hold positions which entail high degrees of autonomy and freedom to act (Szekeres 2011). In such circumstances, individuals may have a clear set of objectives about what they need to achieve, but this can be accompanied with a large degree of autonomy and discretion about how they carry out their function and what their professional priorities are at any one time (Kolsaker 2014). When such staff provide services to their colleagues there is scope for the support provided to be influenced by the quality of the relationships between colleagues, and it is this phenomenon which is investigated in this research.

In a university setting, internal support services are designed to enable other staff to be equipped and empowered to undertake their own roles effectively in delivering educational and knowledge outcomes for their audiences (Small 2008; Ryttberg and Geschwind 2017). Functions that can be more efficiently undertaken by specialists are provided such that other staff are supported to focus on their own areas of competence and responsibility, in the knowledge that their specialist colleagues will assist when required (Dobson 2000). Effective internal service provision therefore underpins the sustainability of the university and ensures that individuals are productive in using their time and expertise to best effect and that the institutional capacity is maximised. In accessing internal support, university staff enter into structurally-mandated relationships with their colleagues, as they are often organisationally bound to services provided on campus when access to alternative off-campus providers is proscribed (Gremler, Bitner and Evans 1995; Gillespie 2018). Such arrangements lead to high levels of interdependence between colleagues as they rely on each other for task assistance and resources. Combine these mutual dependencies with the degrees of discretion enjoyed by professional services staff (Whitchurch 2006; Veles and Carter 2016), and it is clear that interpersonal relationships will be critical in understanding the experience of internal service provision.

Scope of research

The label ‘non-academic staff’ has been criticised for only referring to what this category of staff is not (Sebalj, Holbrook and Bourke 2012), and it covers all support staff on campus whatever their function. For the purposes of this study, the scope was limited to professional services staff as a subset of support staff. These staff are those in roles which provide the potential and opportunity to influence their colleagues’ work at both operational and strategic levels. Staff in this category include those employed in

professions such as finance, Information Technology (IT), legal, Human Resources (HR), marketing, librarianship, as well as those in roles considered to operate at a professional level in a university such as in research support, teaching quality, student support, registry and planning offices. Staff in clerical, estates and retail roles provide essential services which make a difference to the working culture and environment in a university every day, but they are not the focus of this study because their contribution is largely experienced at an operational level.

Service exchanges can be transactional processes which are typically short-term and instrumental, or can be relational exchanges in which interactions are of a longer-term, ongoing nature, and more likely to have a lasting and deeper effect. Relational service exchanges are typical of internal service relationships on campus, and therefore this thesis focuses attention on relationships developed during ongoing service provision, which provide the opportunity for repeated interaction with the same staff member and the development of relational norms.

This study examines internal service provision from a customer perspective - that is, from the point of view of the colleague requesting and accessing support. Examples include an academic staff member accessing support from their Research Office colleagues in managing a research grant, or a professional services staff member requesting advice from HR colleagues about staffing issues in their department. This focus enables an in-depth investigation of the expectations and experiences of the service user, and the outcomes generated for them as a result of service interactions. Whilst the experiences and perspectives of the service provider are relevant, service quality as perceived by the staff member accessing support is the overriding concern for this study. The language of customer and supplier does not always sit well in the context of a university where principles of collegiality prevail (Pitman 2000; Gillespie 2018) and where marketisation has converted students into customers (Taberner 2018), but it is appropriate to use this terminology in presenting this research in order to access and reflect the theoretical underpinnings of the service perspective.

1.2 Research aims and objectives

Through a study of the relationships between internal service providers and their customers, this research aims to extend internal service quality theory by conducting empirical research in a university context. Specifically, the research enables a deeper

understanding of the contribution and dynamics of university professional services staff relationships with their colleagues, and how relationship quality influences individual and institutional performance. By focusing on the perceptions and experiences of service users, this research seeks to uncover the effects of interpersonal relationship quality on service outcomes. To achieve this, the objectives of this research are defined as follows:

- To critically analyse the expectations, experience and outcomes of professional support service use in universities in order to identify the organisational and interpersonal factors which influence customer perceptions of service quality;

- To assess the ways in which interpersonal relationships between professional service staff and their colleagues as customers can influence service expectations, experience and outcomes, and vice versa;

- To examine how relationship quality affects the customer's engagement with support services and their attitudes toward the service provider in the longer term;

- To critically evaluate the costs and benefits of service quality outcomes at individual and institutional levels.

1.3 Contribution to understanding of workplace relationships in universities

This study contributes to internal service quality theory through an empirical study of university professional staff service relationships, from the perspective of their customers. In particular, the research provides a deeper understanding of the value and dynamics of university professional staff relationships with their colleagues, including the organisational and interpersonal factors influencing service use by colleagues, and how these affect internal exchange relationships in HE. Existing academic literature tends to look at staff groups in isolation (e.g. Jameson 2018; Teelken 2012; Graham 2010) and therefore this research provides a more integrated perspective of how relationships between staff influence internal service quality and performance. This study also presents an outcomes-focused perspective linking relationship quality and service quality theory which provides empirical evidence of the consequences of relationship quality for university staff. The implications of differences in the quality of working

relationships are analysed to contribute insights into the tangible costs and benefits to individuals and to the institution of variations in relationship quality.

This research represents an extension of relationship quality theory through an empirical test in an internal service setting. Relationship quality literature to date either considers relationships within a work team (e.g. Sias 2005; Carmeli and Gitell 2009) or in a buyer-seller exchange situation involving external service exchange (e.g. Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Palmatier 2008; Naude and Buttle 2000). This study integrates these two perspectives so that the dynamics of internal service provision can be examined alongside the development of effective co-operative relationships for a more holistic understanding of collaboration within complex organisations. Whilst the link between internal service and external service quality has been established (Hogreve et al. 2016; Schneider and Bowen 2019), internal service quality literature has not considered the role of interpersonal relationships between colleagues in any depth. By focusing on relationship quality, this study addresses this knowledge gap and examines how the dimensions and outcomes of internal relationships differ from those theorised in more externally-focused service exchange perspectives (e.g. Parasuraman 2002; Lyons and Brennan 2018).

The outcomes of this research provide an evidence-base for university managers to inform decisions about the organisation of internal resources and effective support service provision. Findings complement current understandings of internal service delivery models and structures which are more process or transaction oriented, and enable consideration of the positive and negative outcomes of interpersonal relationships to be taken into account in designing and evaluating internal services.

1.4 Underpinning theoretical perspectives

This research drew on current understandings of support staff presented in HE literature, and in particular those exploring relationships and potential tensions between staff groups (e.g. Dobson and Conway 2003), and the changing roles and identities of professional services staff (e.g. Whitchurch 2008; Szekeres 2011). Service perspective and service exchange theory provided the theoretical backdrop for the interpersonal relationships between colleagues in internal service provision, explaining the interdependence of service provider and service customer, and the ways in which these

parties can pool their expertise and resources to co-create value (e.g. Vargo and Lusch 2017).

The multi-dimensional interpersonal relationships between colleagues were conceptualised using the theoretical lenses supplied by relationship quality and trust theory (e.g. Palmatier et al. 2006; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995). Such theories provide explanations of the role of discretionary behaviour and how positive relationships can lead to co-operation and performance outcomes. Both relationship quality and trust theory are grounded in social exchange theory (e.g. Blau 1964; Granovetter 1985; Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2006), which was used in this current study to inform the design of the empirical research element.

1.5 Outline of thesis

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is divided into three parts. Part One sets the scene by presenting a review of existing academic literature and demonstrating how it informs and relates to the aims of the current study. Chapter 2 examines the Higher Education context in which the working relationships play out, charting issues such as the complexity and diversity of HE, the external challenges encountered in the sector, and the ways in which managerialism and the locus of authority affects the leadership and organisational culture of HE institutions. Chapter 3 explores the service context, and presents current theoretical understandings of service quality, value and design, including perspectives on internal service provision and how service is experienced in an HE context. Having established the context within which interpersonal relationships between colleagues operate, Chapter 4 then examines the workplace relationships themselves, commencing with an overview of the role of support staff in HE. Attention then turns to the concept of interpersonal trust as a basis for co-operation, as well as the part that relationship quality plays in service provision, including the dimensions of trust, commitment, satisfaction and reciprocity.

Part Two of this thesis focuses on the empirical research elements of this study. Based on the theoretical understandings afforded by the review of literature detailed in Part One, Chapter 5 presents the conceptual framework which was developed to guide the operationalisation of the empirical research. The framework allows an appreciation of the stages of internal service exchange – expectations, experience and outcomes – and how the perception of the customer can be influenced by the quality of their working

relationship with the service provider at each stage. Chapter 6 provides details of the research philosophy, design and methodological considerations, and Chapter 7 explains the process of data collection and analysis, establishing the credibility of the research process and the rigour with which the study was conducted. Also included in these chapters are comprehensive accounts of the criteria used for the selection of sites and participants, sample characteristics, ethical considerations and analytical techniques used to generate thematic insights.

Part Three presents the findings of the empirical research, and discusses the implications for internal service quality and relationship quality theory. The findings of this study are mapped against existing research to demonstrate where this current study further develops theoretical understandings of the role of interpersonal relationships in an internal service setting. Chapter 8 provides an overview of the findings of the empirical study as the basis for more detailed discussion in subsequent chapters of each research question posed. Chapter 9 examines findings on the organisational and interpersonal factors affecting service exchange relationships, and Chapter 10 draws out five emergent themes which illustrate how relationship dynamics influence service quality. Chapter 11 examines the costs and benefits of internal service quality outcomes and Chapter 12 assesses how the findings of the empirical research relate to the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 5.

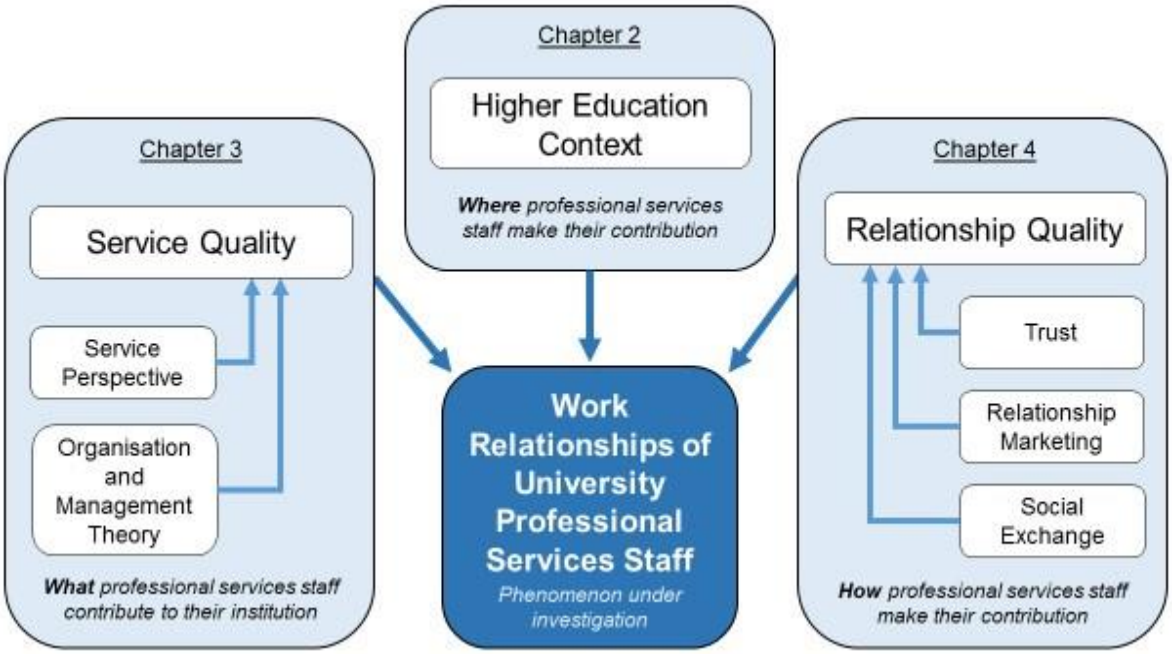
The concluding Chapter 13 summarises the contribution that this research makes to scholarship within this field, articulating the limitations of the study as well as areas for future research. This study was motivated by an interest in generating empirical evidence to inform HE leaders in their strategies for professional service provision on campus, and therefore this thesis concludes with a discussion of the implications of findings for HE managers and professional services staff and how these insights may be applied in practice for the benefit of all university staff and those with whom they work.

PART ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

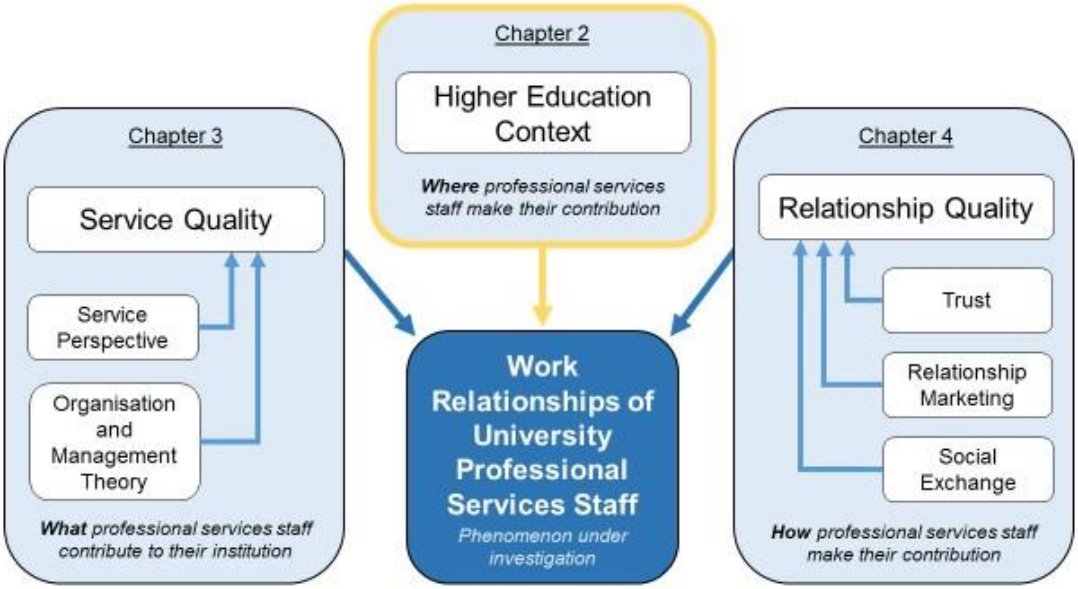
Part One of this thesis presents the theoretical basis for this study, drawing on research literature across the fields of Higher Education, service quality and relationship quality. Figure 1.1 below maps the relationship between these three bodies of literature and demonstrates how insights from each domain are incorporated into the conceptualisation of university professional service staff relationships in this thesis.

Chapter 2 examines the Higher Education context, as the backdrop to this research. With the purpose of university professional services being to provide a service to their colleagues and the university, the service perspective and service quality are core concepts that are addressed in Chapter 3. Lastly, Chapter 4 explores the way in which professional services staff relate to their colleagues as customers, through a review of relationship quality theories.

Figure 1.1: Mapping of key concepts and research domains across thesis chapters



CHAPTER 2: THE HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT



Supporting the academy, professional services staff in universities occupy "separate but interdependent roles, equal in importance in terms of organisational survival" (Dobson and Conway 2003: 132). They must navigate the complexities of the university ecosystem with high degrees of sensitivity, diplomacy and adaptability in order to bring their contributions to bear on their institution. This research investigates the influence and implications of workplace relations of this staff group by examining their service relationships from the perspectives of trust and relationship quality. Specifically, this research examines the interpersonal relationships of professional services staff with those they support to discover how the quality of the relationships relate to perceptions of service quality.

With a particular interest in the quality of relationships between support staff and those to whom they provide a service, understanding the motivations and priorities of various staff groups is fundamental in appreciating the dynamics of these interactions. Equally of interest are the outcomes of such interactions in terms of the ways in which individual and institutional performance are affected by the relationship quality because the consequences may have tangible and intangible effects on overall service quality.

This chapter explores the context in which university employees operate and identifies characteristics particular to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) which provide the backdrop to the relationships between colleagues. The literature review considered specific aspects of these relationships including trust, co-operation, power dynamics and interpersonal relations as well as features in the wider university environment. This chapter presents the key themes in Higher Education scholarship which contextualise this study and highlights factors which are likely to have a bearing on the way that the dynamics of working relationships on campus are played out. These include structural, political and cultural aspects of university life within which staff experience their working practice. Table 2.1 summarises the overarching themes that emerged from the review.

This study draws on HE literature from various international contexts in identifying contemporary challenges facing the sector, although the focus of this research is the experience of staff in English universities. The English HE sector has undergone a series of transformations during the last three decades, as it has evolved from an elite system open only to a minority of the population to a mass market, as a result of government policy to widen access and increase rates of participation (Giannakis and Bullivant 2016). Universities are no longer 'Ivory Towers' enjoying financial autonomy and intellectual freedoms, but are more subject to the changing financial and political climate (Barry, Chandler and Clark 2001) and to active state intervention and scrutiny of their role in society (Jameson 2018; Kolsaker 2014; Nickson 2014).

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, the UK HE sector consisted of a two-tier system of research-intensive, elite universities and teaching-intensive, vocationally-oriented polytechnics. The 1988 Education Reform Act and the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act established a more unified system in which former polytechnics became incorporated as universities (Dearlove 2002; Shattock 2008). As part of these reforms, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) was established to guide the distribution of public funds to universities and implement government policy (Trow 1994; Strike and Taylor 2009). Colloquially, the 'old' universities are those established pre-1992, and the 'new' universities are those created post-1992, and their governance structures vary as a result of different government policy at the time of their formation (Shattock 2013). Whilst institutional history continues to provide a point of differentiation, universities are now diversifying and blending their missions so that

there is no longer a clear line between research-intensive and teaching-intensive institutions (Deem 2010).

Since the turn of the millennium, the UK government's policy to expand access to higher education and the resultant funding pressures has led to fundamental changes in how universities are managed and overseen (Middlehurst 2013). At the same time, the shift of the financial burden of higher education to students through a significant rise in tuition fees and reduced government funding has positioned students as consumers. The pressure on universities to demonstrate economic value to both students and government has driven the use of league tables and rankings of institutional performance to differentiate universities in an increasingly competitive market (Shattock 2017; Middlehurst 2013; Jameson 2012). English universities now undergo regular government-led quality assessment exercises to determine access to public funds in their core areas of teaching, research and knowledge exchange (Prysor and Henley 2018). Most recently, the concept of the student as consumer has been emphasised by the replacement of HEFCE by the Office for Students, established by the 2017 Higher Education and Research Act to give primacy to the student voice and cement the market values of consumer / supplier relationship dynamics (Morrish 2019).

Table 2.1: Thematic review of Higher Education Literature

Topic	Examples of relevant papers	Key themes
Complexity and diversity	Burnes, Wend and By (2014); Jarvis (2000); Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno (2008); MacFarlane (2015); Sporn (1996); Whitchurch and Gordon (2013)	Role of universities in society with diverse stakeholder groups and interdependencies; divergent goals, values, attitudes and priorities of constituent parts of university; role of integrative leadership and inclusive management approaches in managing diversity and complexity of HEIs; challenges of changing external and policy environment.
Governance, control and accountability	Alexander (2000); By, Diefenbach and Klarner (2008); Cullen and Perrewe (1981); Kezar (2004); Dearlove (2002); Jarzabkowski (2002); Maughan Brown (2000); Middlehurst (2013); Ouchi (1979); Shattock (2008, 2013, 2017); Stensaker and Vabo (2013); Taylor (2013)	Tensions between collegial and managerial approaches to governance; shared governance; funding constraints as driver for greater accountability; limitations of collegial styles of governance in responding to rapidly changing circumstances; role of control mechanisms in supporting co-operation; importance of trusting relationships for effective governance; centralisation.
Managerialism	Anderson (2006); Barry, Chandler and Clark (2001); Burnes, Wend and By (2014); Davis (2017); Davis, Rensburg and Venter (2016); Deem and Brehony (2005); Nickson (2014); Olssen and Peters (2005); Parker and Jary (1995); Peters (2013); Preston (2001); Shepherd (2018); Smeenk et al. (2009); Teelken (2012); Trow (1994); Waugh (1998); White, Carvalho and Riordan (2011); Yokoyama (2006)	Differences between 'soft' and 'hard' managerialism; responses of staff to managerialist approaches ranging from compliance to subversion and resistance; managerialism as an indicator of an absence of trust; language and discourse of managerialism; erosion of academic professionalism by neo-liberalism; increase in managerial power at expense of academic autonomy; instrumentalism as response to managerialism; managerialism as an ideology.
Leadership and management	Bryman (2007); Clegg and McAuley (2005); Jameson (2012, 2018); Migliore (2012); Rowlands (2018); Shattock (2010); Spendlove (2007); Yielder and Codling (2004)	Tension between top-down management styles and values of academic freedom and autonomy; role of values-based leadership in overcoming tensions; importance of situational context in understanding leadership behaviours; the role of middle management in HE; academic voice in institutional decision-making.

Organisational culture and climate	Allen (2003); Kenny (2018); Lauring and Selmer (2011); McMurray and Scott (2013); McNay (2005); Smart and St John (1996); Sporn (1996); Stensaker (2018), de Zilwa (2007)	Diverse and disparate cultures and sub-cultures in universities; importance of recognition of mutual interdependence of units; formation of collective identity; poor climate as a barrier to performance; development of academic culture.
Employee-employee relations	Deem (2010), Dobson and Conway (2003); Gray (2015); Kuo (2009); Mcinnis (1998); Ryttberg and Geschwind (2017); Sebalj, Holbrook and Bourke (2012); Simpson and Fitzgerald (2014); Veles and Carter (2016), Wohlmuther (2008)	Binary divide and tensions between academic and non-academic staff in universities; role of knowledge sharing in improving social climate; influence of organisational factors on perceptions of division; collaboration between groups of staff or across the university.
Performance, quality and effectiveness	Alexander (2000); Al Kilani and Twaissi (2017); Baltaru (2018); Bejan et al. (2015); Ciancio (2018); Decramer, Smolders and Vanderstraeten (2013); Gonzales (2015); Kairuz et al. (2016); Kok and McDonald (2017); Liefner (2003); Smeenk et al. (2009); Tipples and Jones (1999)	Impact of performance measurement techniques and difficulties in quantifying qualitative outcomes; performance management and HR; impact of managerialism on employee performance; influence of professional services on organisational performance.
Professional identity	Gornitzka and Larsen (2004); Kolsaker (2014); McKenna and Boughey (2014); Regan and Graham (2018); Roberts (2018); Sebalj, Holbrook and Bourke (2012); Small (2008); Whitchurch (2008)	Occupational identity of professional staff; professionalisation of administrative staff; academic and disciplinary identity and affiliation; contribution of support staff to development of organisational identity.
Experience of work	Berkovich and Wasserman (2017); Chandler, Barry and Clark (2002); Gillespie (2018); Strike and Taylor (2009); Tipples and Jones (1999); Tytherleigh (2005)	Human cost of managerialist approaches; concerns of workload, career insecurity and equality; work-related stress caused by job insecurity, work relationships, resources and communication; relationship between job satisfaction, motivation, organisational commitment and organisational trust.
Trust	Gawley (2007); Hoecht (2006); Jonasson, Normann and Lauring (2014); Newell and Swan (2000); Tierney (2003); Trow (2006); Vidovich and Currie (2011)	Decline in trust of universities by government; decline of trust in public institutions; perceptions by academics that trust has been replaced by control; role of trust in facilitating interdisciplinary research; trust as enabling co-operation and knowledge-sharing.
Co-operation and collaboration	Cox and Verbaan (2016); Diamond and Rush (2012); Dollinger, Lodge and Coates (2018); Graham and Regan (2016); Hoppes and Holley (2014); Meng, Lui and Xu (2014); Small (2008); Yen et al. (2014)	Tension between competition and co-operation between staff groups in balance of power; challenges of intra-organisational collaboration; importance of co-operation in tackling institutional challenges; co-creation in HE.

2.1 Complexity and diversity of contemporary Higher Education

Higher Education in the UK has experienced a period of rapid change over the last 25 years, with the expansion of university activity from the traditional focus on teaching and research, and increasing competition in a global market (Burnes, Wend and By 2014; Olssen and Peters 2005; Stensaker 2018). Even without such changes, universities are inherently complex and fragmented organisations with diverse inputs, outputs and processes, with multiple sub-units and disciplinary traditions, each with potential for different goals, values and cultures, and with high degrees of individual autonomy (Davis, Rensburg and Venter 2016; Sporn 1996).

Jarvis (2000) highlights globalisation and corporatisation as key challenges for universities in responding rapidly to the development of knowledge-based society and advanced capitalism, whilst Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno (2008) point to the changing social contract between state, society and HE, and an increased expectation that universities will engage with their wider communities in knowledge creation and exchange as well as in education and research, leading potentially to mission confusion. Diversity in the university community provides a rich and vibrant organisational culture focused on innovation and knowledge exchange, but can also produce challenges in social and cultural aspects of university life which value integration (Selmer, Jonasson and Lauring 2013).

Duke (2001) compares the UK experience with that in Australia and describes an era of 'supercomplexity', which requires innovation, partnership networks and relational ways of working to successfully navigate the challenges faced. Similarly, Whitchurch and Gordon (2013) call for integrative and inclusive management which recognises the importance of relational ways of working which can adapt to changing circumstances. The importance of institutional adaptation and flexibility in responding effectively to a rapidly changing environment is clear (de Zilwa 2007; Dearlove 2002), and the need for individual staff to continually adapt their skills in order to cope with organisational challenges is also recognised (Mcinnis 1998; Nickson 2014).

The challenging nature of the university context as described above partly stems from the intrinsic nature of a university, but to a large extent results from changes in the external environment or institutional responses to such changes. A number of factors are regularly cited – and sometimes lamented – by scholars as fundamentally changing

the nature of university life. These include the movement from elite to mass access of higher education (McNay 2005; Giannakis and Bullivant 2016), the resultant work intensification and accountability requirements on academic staff (Anderson 2006; Taberner 2018), influences of globalisation and corporatisation (Jarvis 2000; Olssen and Peters 2005), and the increasing marketisation of higher education which creates a dissonance between corporate-style business operations of a modern university and its traditional educational mission (Samier 2002; Taylor 2017).

The increasing requirements for external accountability derive from funding pressures and government policy, as well as the introduction of quality assurance regimes (Olssen 2016). Perceived as one-way accountability and a reduction in academic freedom and professional autonomy, such policies are viewed as a threat to academic quality in that they are part of a more utilitarian view by government of the purpose of education (Hoecht 2006; Alexander 2000; Olssen 2016). With external scrutiny seen to be replacing self-regulation by universities, the pressure of benchmarking and league table aspirations can lead to a culture of 'hyperaccountability' in which non-measured or non-measurable activities such as community engagement are unappreciated (Gonzales 2015).

In the context of measurable outcomes and accountability for the public funding of Higher Education, the question of public trust in institutions and in the HE sector as a positive driver of social and economic gains arises, and universities have a responsibility to address these issues with their communities (Trow 2006; Vidovich and Currie 2011; Tierney 2003). The manner in which universities engage with these external demands is driven by the organisational culture, leadership and management approaches in each institution, and these aspects of the Higher Education workplace are covered in the following sections of this chapter.

2.2 Managerialism

Managerialism is a recurring theme in much HE literature (e.g. Davis 2017; Deem and Brehony 2005; Karlsson 2019; Nickson 2014; Parker and Jary 1995; Peters 2013; Teelken 2012; Trow 1994). As a dimension of globalisation, neo-liberalism in universities has led to the commodification of teaching and research and an emphasis on measurable outputs (Olssen and Peters 2005). Managerialism is a manifestation of neo-liberalism and new public management ideas in the organisational context of a university

(Peters 2013) and is ideological in nature (Deem and Brehony 2005; Shepherd 2018). Managerialism involves the adoption of private sector practices, management instruments and values such as marketisation of services, the primacy of the customer, and the monitoring and management of employee performance (Deem and Brehony 2005; Smeenk et al. 2009). Trow (1994) makes a distinction between 'soft managerialism' which is derived from budgetary pressures and is internally-driven and 'hard managerialism' which is driven by the external policy environment and political ideology.

In universities, managerialism is characterised by the pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness in services, an emphasis on teams and flexibility rather than individual roles, and a focus on accountability and monitoring as seen through league tables, performance indicators, benchmarking and target-setting (Deem and Brehony 2005). Preston (2001: 348) views managerialism as "subjectivity masquerading as objectivity", and describes how the "ethic of effectiveness" can lead to instrumental rationalism and losing sight of unmeasurable, intangible qualities and value.

The positive outcomes of managerialism in terms of reduction in inefficiencies, poor performance and ambiguity are noted by some scholars (Davis, Rensburg and Venter 2016; Smeenk et al. 2009), but many studies of the impact of managerialism on academic life view the phenomenon as counter-productive (e.g. Parker and Jary 1995; Peters 2013; Barry, Chandler and Clark 2001; Teelken 2012; Davis, Rensburg and Venter 2016; Waugh 1998). A common theme in the literature is the tension between managerial approaches and the traditional academic values of collegiality (e.g. Dearlove 2002; Shattock 2013, 2017). Managerialism is seen as an indicator of a lack of trust in traditional academic forms of governance, with trust being replaced by control and top-down policy formulation (Trow 1994, 2006; Anderson 2006; Dearlove 2002; Hoecht 2006; Yokoyama 2006). Quality assurance practices are imposed on academics, compromising academic freedom and undervaluing academic judgement, leading to distrust and disaffection (Davis 2017). Managerialism represents a clash of norms and values between universities and government (Waugh 1998). Whilst Burnes, Wend and By (2014) recognise the drawbacks of collegiality in its limitations in responding effectively to a rapidly changing external environment and to protect the interests of the university as a whole, they note that the withdrawal of participative, more collegiate, consensual forms of governance can demotivate staff and make strategic change more difficult to embed.

Managerial power resides in the senior leadership of the institution, sometimes occupied by those without academic backgrounds, whilst collegiate power resides in the academy within the diverse disciplinary structures. Power struggles are played out through the debate on appropriate forms of governance, as managerial power is seen to erode power traditionally held by the academy and to reduce academic autonomy (Deem and Brehony 2005; Parker and Jary 1995; Teelken 2012; Kenny 2018). The dichotomy of collegial and managerial authority is ultimately seen as unhelpful in the current university context, with the solution resting in partnership between the academy and the administration with shared forms of governance which recognise the values and motivations of both groups and which can be responsive to modern strategic challenges (Dearlove 2002; Deem 2010; Middlehurst 2013; Taylor 2013; Stensaker and Vabo 2013).

A number of studies have explored the effects of managerialism on university communities and documented the responses of those encountering its practices (Nickson 2014; Anderson 2006; Teelken 2012; White, Carvalho and Riordan 2011; Szekeres 2006). Nickson (2014) describes academic staff as achieving their goals in spite of management practices not because of them, whilst Anderson (2006) recounts the exhaustion and demoralisation of academics as result of the intensity of workload required in servicing accountability measures. Control measures can erode positive interpersonal behaviour such as knowledge-sharing and innovation (Davis, Rensburg and Venter 2016), and the "dysfunctional centralism" of modern universities designed for closer control ironically means that implementing change is harder because staff feel alienated and are less motivated or engaged in the process (Burnes, Wend and By 2014: 905).

The human cost of managerialism can include workplace stress, bullying and insecurity (Chandler, Barry and Clark 2002; Pick, Teo and Yeung 2012). The impact of managerialism-induced staff disaffection and workplace stress on job satisfaction, trust and work relationships and organisational commitment has also been researched, and it is noted that the subsequent reduction in goodwill is not captured in efficiency measures and can therefore be under-appreciated (Tipples and Jones 1999; Tytherleigh 2005). Barry, Chandler and Clark (2001: 89) describe the "managerial assault" experienced by academic staff as a result of drives for cost efficiencies, measurement and control of performance, and the creative ways they find to counter its effects. Various manifestations of resistance to managerialism by academic staff have been noted and include ignoring, circumventing or subverting measures in order to mediate or moderate

its impact on their work (Jameson 2018; Gonzales 2015). Teelken (2012) found that it is the way in which managerialism is implemented, without regard for the nature of universities as autonomous institutions, which was the source of such negativity, and here the role of leadership comes to the fore.

2.3 Leadership, authority and control

Given the significant challenges and tensions characterising university life as outlined above, it is unsurprising that leadership in higher education has received attention in the literature, particularly in relation to the competencies required in such circumstances (Spendlove 2007; Bryman 2007). The need for values-based leadership which can unify a diverse organisation with ever-shifting priorities is recognised (Jameson 2012), as is the capacity for effective leadership to establish the conditions for organisational adaptability and success through building trust and positive relationships (Gawley 2007; Kezar 2004; Migliore 2012). The role of middle managers in HE (academic heads of department, for example) is explored by Clegg and McAuley (2005), who call for a more productive debate which recognises the potential for these roles to counter the duality of the managerialism / collegiality discourse. Middle managers play a critical role in implementing organisational change, and in navigating the tension between managerialism and collegiality they can operate to limit the dysfunctional consequences of both managerialist ideology and external policy pressures.

Leadership priorities and values can be interpreted and understood through the organisation of institutional resources, especially as organisational resources are the means through which the university achieves its strategic objectives. The experience of resource allocation can illustrate power dynamics, hierarchies and relationships between the different parts of the organisation and can highlight inconsistencies with organisational goals (Hackman 1985; Meng, Liu and Xu 2014). The illustration of relative political power through an ability to obtain required resources is evident in Farndale and Hope-Hailey's (2009) study of a personnel department and in Forbes-Mewett and Nyland's (2013) work, which views funding shortfalls in international student support as an indicator of the lack of power of support functions.

The issue of centralisation emerges from Higher Education research as a concern which relates to governance and control, and with implications for leadership and the organisation of resources in universities. The key to the centralisation / decentralisation

debate is the locus of control, as the positioning of authority within the university has ramifications across the institution in terms of perceptions of priorities and strategic direction. Implications include whether authority for decision-making is concentrated at the top of the organisational hierarchy or delegated to lower levels (Cullen and Perrewe 1981), how policy and strategy is developed and governed (Shattock 2008, 2013, 2017), and how limited resources are allocated in the face of competing demands (Jarzabkowski 2002). This latter issue is apparent in the decisions a university makes about how professional support services are organised and resourced, and whether control of support functions is held centrally or locally.

Centralisation can be implemented as a response to the external environment in which the institution operates, particularly in the face of increased competition and the need for a strong, unified approach (Jarzabkowski 2002). Uncertainty and turbulence in the external environment can drive institutions to adopt a more centralised approach as a means to reducing ambiguity and maintaining tighter controls (Cameron, Kim and Whetten 1987). However, whilst centralisation may enable the institution to respond more quickly to external challenges in a unified manner, it is decentralisation which allows greater levels of innovation and adaptability at lower levels within the university, so that more differentiated approaches can be developed which respond to particular pressures in the different markets and audiences encountered by disparate parts of the university (Massey and Kyriazis 2007). Universities therefore need to find a balance between the imperatives of control and adaptability which fits their institutional dynamics, structures, culture and history, as well as responds to the external challenges in the wider context (Maughan-Brown 2000).

The concept of centralisation has been cited as an outcome of managerialism, and therefore conceived of as a negative phenomenon where encountered on campus (e.g. White, Carvalho and Riordan 2011). As discussed in Section 2.2 above, managerialism is characterised by perceptions of low trust relations between the executive management of the university and the wider institution, with power and control concentrated centrally at the expense of locally-informed decision-making (By, Diefenbach and Klarner 2008). Academic participation in governance is pushed to the periphery as a result of greater centralisation of decision-making, and the academic voice is distanced by the concentration of executive power achieved at the expense of more collegiate forms of governance (Shattock 2013; Rowlands 2018).

More positive effects of centralisation are found in evidence that centralisation can enable more effective co-ordination and control of resources to advance institution-wide initiatives, policies and collaborations, in ways that are not possible in decentralised structures, where the parts of the university focus only on their own needs and priorities and not those of the institution as a whole (Maughan-Brown 2000). Centralisation also allows university leaders to make better strategic use of limited resources through greater opportunities for cross-subsidy between departments in ways that may not be possible or politically palatable in more devolved structures (Jarzabkowski 2002).

2.4 Organisational culture and climate in HE

The combination of external environmental pressures with internal leadership and management approaches drives the characteristics of a university's organisational culture, and the climate in which individuals experience it and interact (De Zilwa 2007; Stensaker and Vabo 2013). Recognising the complex and social nature of universities, Sporn (1996) identifies university culture as a regulator of behaviour in the absence of strong control mechanisms, but also acknowledges the existence of multiple and divergent sub-cultures, especially distinct disciplinary cultures, which lead to universities acting as "a conglomerate of autonomous subunits" with different values and beliefs (1996: 43).

A strong organisational culture is characterised by congruence between stated values and beliefs and how these are manifested in practice (Smart and St John 1996). Congruence between the goals of an individual and the unit in which they work is also a significant factor in the development of a collective identity, and the ability of a unit to adapt to organisational change, determining whether sub-cultures clash or can coexist (McNay 2005; de Zilwa 2007).

In an environment characterised by constant organisational change, cumulative experiences of change initiatives will influence individuals' perceptions of the organisational climate and their feelings of security, trust and optimism about their employer (Allen 2003). The role of organisational climate in fostering positive interpersonal relationships and interactions is noted by Lauring and Selmer (2011), whilst a poor organisational climate can act as a barrier to performance and employee well-being due to the effects on job satisfaction, productivity, commitment, motivation and

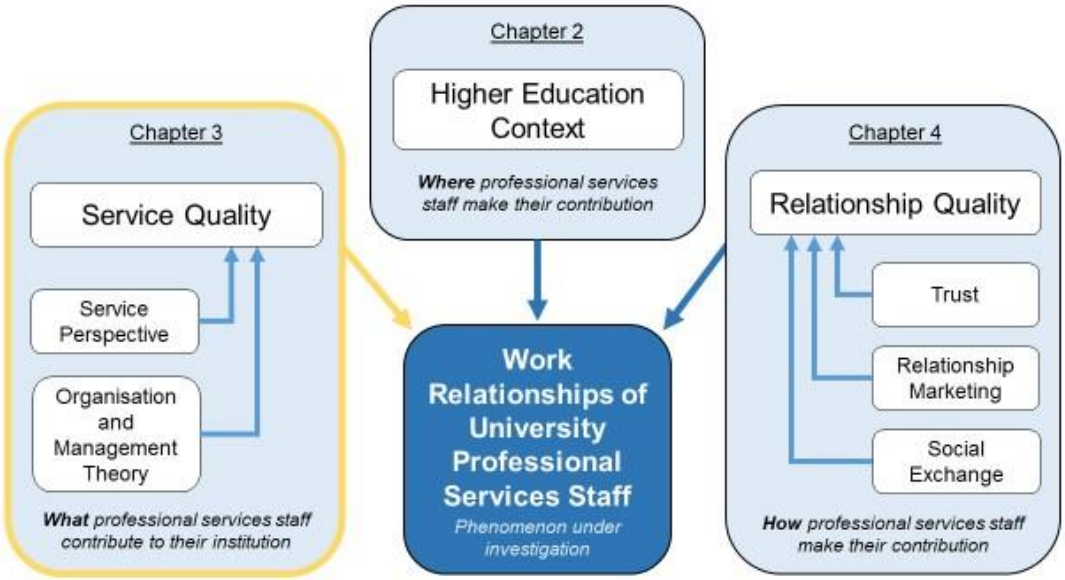
service quality (McMurray and Scott 2013). Likewise, Pick, Teo and Yeung (2012) report on the impact of managerialism on support staff, finding that the prevailing climate is not conducive to employee engagement, communication and positive working relations.

Chapter summary

The review of HE literature presented in this chapter highlights particular features of the UK Higher Education environment, which is the setting for this study on the working relationships of university professional services staff. The studies reviewed and discussed above collectively consider higher education at both macro (institutional) and micro (employee) levels, as well as the external and internal environments. At a macro level, the role of universities in society is considered, particularly the relationship with the state in terms of funding and the imposition of accountability measures. At a micro level, staff experiences in the workplace are explored, with respect to the impact of leadership, managerialism and HR policy on day to day working life, and issues of health and wellbeing are also recounted.

Of particular relevance to this research is the identification of political, structural, and organisational aspects which characterise the working environment of UK Higher Education institutions today. The literature reviewed clarifies the context in which co-operative relationships between staff are developed, and highlights both the challenges and the importance of nurturing such working relationships.

CHAPTER 3: THE SERVICE CONTEXT



University professional support services are internal services which are designed to provide resources required for colleagues to effectively carry out their roles (Llewellyn 2001). They support the activities and relationships of the institution with its external customers and stakeholders. With the specific focus of this thesis being the interpersonal relationships between colleagues as service providers and service customers, this chapter provides the context for the nature and purpose of these working relationships. An appreciation of the service context is vital in understanding the dynamics and dimensions of these interdependent relationships.

This chapter explores the service literature and theory relevant to interpersonal relationships between providers and customers in an internal service setting. Starting with an exploration of the core concepts of service, service quality and value, the chapter reviews elements of the service perspective which have a particular bearing on interpersonal relationships in the workplace. The chapter progresses by considering aspects of service structure and organisation which influence the dynamics of internal service provision, and then examines the treatment in the literature of service within an HE context.

3.1 Service, quality and value

The concepts of service, quality and value are integral to the service perspective, and are closely linked and interrelated such that each concept must be understood in order to appreciate the service perspective in full. These elements are outlined below, illustrated with the most influential research for each concept.

3.1.1 The concept of service

The world's most advanced economies are dominated by services (Ostrom et al. 2010), and the concept of service can be viewed as an organising perspective for the management of organisations (Greer, Lusch and Vargo 2016). Services are considered as intangible and defined as "processes which consist of a set of activities which take place in interactions between a customer and people, goods and other physical resources, systems and / or infrastructures representing the service provider and possibly involving other customers, which aim at solving customers' problems" (Gronroos 2006: 323). This definition incorporates the core concepts of interaction between many resources, service as a process, and customer-orientation as a driving force. More simply put, service is "the application of resources for the benefit of others" (Vargo and Lusch 2017: 48).

A service perspective is concerned with interactions rather than exchange of goods, and service logic is now the prevailing approach to understanding market operations (Gronroos 2006). Vargo and Lusch's (2004) influential paper outlines the service perspective as a 'service-dominant logic' in contrast to the 'goods-dominant logic' of traditional understandings of economies and markets. Goods-dominant logic is product-oriented, focusing on tangible resources, embedded value and transactions, whilst service-dominant logic centres on intangible resources, co-creation of value and relationships, and is customer-oriented, interactive and dynamic.

Whilst Vargo and Lusch's (2004) paper has been highly influential, the conceptualisation of service and service logic as a relational process has been the subject of significant ongoing debate and research to further refine these insights (Wilden et al. 2017). For example, it is questioned whether the division between goods-dominant logic and service-dominant logic is helpful, and whether a service perspective could be applied to all exchange markets, including those involving tangible products (Gronroos 2006; Hibbert, Winklhofer and Temerak 2012). The original foundational premises and axioms

presented in the 2004 paper have been refined and condensed into the following five statements (Vargo and Lusch 2016: 18):

1. Service is the fundamental basis of exchange
2. Value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary
3. All social and economic actors are resource integrators
4. Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary
5. Value co-creation is co-ordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements.

Through the course of this scholarly debate, services marketing has been recognised as a field in its own right (Berry 2016), with relationships, networks and interaction as the core constituents (Gummesson 2017).

Within a service organisation, the service climate provides the conditions for effective service delivery (Bowen and Schneider 2014). The service climate describes the employees' shared sense of the policies and practices relating to service quality as experienced in their specific workplace, and can moderate service quality outcomes through facilitating customer-centric practices (Ehrhart et al. 2011). Variability in service climate can lead to variability in customer satisfaction as service employees' behaviour will be less consistent (Schneider, Salvaggio and Subirats 2002). Service climate is especially important in organisations where the service requires high customer contact, involves a high degree of service intangibility, and relies on employees to work interdependently in delivering the service (Mayer, Ehrhart and Schneider 2009).

3.1.2 The concept of service quality

The concept of service quality has received much attention as it is instrumental in delivering competitive advantage through its effects on customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and business performance (Khan and Matlay 2009; Heskett et al. 2008; Prakash 2019). Consistent with Vargo and Lusch (2016), service quality is an evaluative phenomenon which is driven by the perceptions of the service beneficiary concerning their experience of interaction with the service provider (Prakash 2019). Service quality is important to both customers and service providers, but it is context-dependent and reliant on personal judgement and values, making it a difficult concept to analyse (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985).

The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction is complex and not necessarily direct, as contextual factors can influence perceptions of quality, such as cultural norms in international exchange (Akaka, Vargo and Lusch 2013), or social structures and practices (Edvardsson, Skalen and Tronvoll 2012). Whilst many studies view customer satisfaction as an outcome of service quality (e.g. Cronin and Taylor 1992; Heskett et al. 2008; Zomerdijk and Voss 2010), others view the relationship in reverse (Sahney 2016), or see satisfaction as mediating perceptions of service quality on the part of the customer which in turn influences their loyalty and intentions to repeat purchase (Brady and Robertson 2001).

Antecedents of service quality include favourable and unfavourable service encounter experiences (Sivakumar, Li and Dong 2014), service climate and organisational culture (Mayer, Ehrhart and Schneider 2009; Khan and Matlay 2009), and information and communication by the service provider (Sultan and Wong 2012). Organisational citizenship behaviour, when individuals go beyond the requirements of their job role to help a colleague or their organisation, is also a precursor to service quality (Bell and Menguc 2002). The outcomes of service quality include customer retention as a key behavioural consequence yielding positive financial benefits at firm level (Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman 1996), customer loyalty (Heskett et al. 2008), productivity for both customer and provider (Parasuraman 2002), and customer trust and satisfaction (Sultan and Wong 2013).

Measurement of service quality can assist service providers in diagnosing shortfalls in quality or in predicting the conditions or resources required to improve quality. Measures of service quality predominantly test the perceptions of customers about the quality of the service received, and can involve an evaluation against expected service levels or against an ideal standard (Prakash 2019). The SERVQUAL model adopted in many empirical studies (e.g. Smith, Smith and Clarke 2007; Sahney 2016) tests customer perceptions of service quality by measuring the magnitude and direction of the gap between their expectations and perceptions of service quality received (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985). Used as a diagnostic tool at organisation rather than transaction level, the measure has been refined several times in response to empirical and theoretical testing, and incorporates five distinct but interrelated dimensions of

service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml 1991; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1994).

Customer expectations are typically conceived of as a zone of tolerance rather than a single reference point (Sivakumar, Li and Dong 2014), and difficulties in comparing customer expectations with customer perceptions of quality have resulted in alternative measures being employed, such as service performance tool SERVPERF as defined by Cronin and Taylor (1992, 1994). SERVPERF prioritises the attitudes of the customer and their assessment of service performance against an ideal standard as a determinant of service quality (Cronin and Taylor 1992).

3.1.3 The concepts of value and value co-creation

Value is a central concept in service-dominant logic, and it derives from the use of services (service-in-use) rather than through exchange value (value-in-exchange), as in the goods-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch 2012). Value can relate to performance or benefit obtained by the customer, but should not be thought of as a property of an output but rather as an experiential outcome (Vargo and Lusch 2017). Value is a dynamic concept and is perceived and determined by the customer based on experience and context, and over time (Gronroos and Voima 2013). Value can refer to tangible benefits such as visible contributions and economic advantages, and to intangible benefits such as access to knowledge, capabilities, and social advances (Lyons and Brennan 2019).

The service provider acts as a facilitator in the customer's creation of value through their use of a service, and by working in partnership the provider can co-create value with the customer (Gronroos 2011). Value co-creation happens when customers integrate resources provided by the service provider with their own resources and those of other network actors to generate outcomes of a greater value than would be otherwise possible (Hibbert, Winklhofer and Temerak 2012). This process of value co-creation and resource integration is central to an understanding of how the interdependent roles of providers and customers are co-ordinated to achieve value from service (Ostrom et al. 2015). The full process of value co-creation as detailed by Vargo and Lusch (2016) is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: The narrative and process of Service-Dominant Logic

(Vargo and Lusch 2016:7)

Value co-creation is promoted when customers and providers are able to learn from each other in order to make effective use of integrated resources (Hibbert, Winklhofer and Temerak 2012), and is enhanced through the possession of organisational capabilities to facilitate interaction and resource integration (Karpen, Bove and Lukas 2012). Other significant factors in value co-creation processes are customer engagement (Brodie et al. 2015), the extent to which customers are involved in service design (Yu and Sangiorgi 2018), the emotional intelligence and empathy of the service provider (Delpichitre, Beeler-Connelly and Chaker 2018), and the goal compatibility of the exchange partners in cultural, technical and strategic terms (Chaurasia 2018).

Value co-creation is an inherently interactional phenomenon whether the service exchange occurs directly between individuals or via an interactive service platform such as a website (Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2018). As a dynamic process, value co-creation is variable over the course of the customer relationship lifecycle, with the greatest

opportunity for value creation being when the relationship is mature (Cambra-Fierro, Melero-Polo and Seses 2018). In addition to exchange partners possessing the competencies and social capabilities required to work together to integrate resources, their degree of motivation in doing so determines the direction and intensity of their collaboration (Findsrud, Tronvoll and Edvardsson 2018).

The quality of the co-operative relationship between exchange partners determines the extent to which value co-creation is possible, and the degree of interdependence of complementary resources is a critical factor (Dyer, Singh and Hesterly 2018). The significance of the quality of the relationship between customer and provider and its interactional and interdependent nature means that value co-creation is a useful conceptual model for understanding service relationships in an internal service setting. The concept of value co-creation resonates strongly with the focus of this thesis, as it helps to explain how co-operative and collaborative relationships are driven through service exchange.

3.1.4 The service eco-system

The concept of service ecosystem proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2011) underscores the dynamic nature of resource integration for value co-creation as an ongoing, reconfigurable and adaptable process. The phrase acknowledges a more holistic, systems view of service in which elements are interconnected, and recognises the significance of networks for co-operation and co-ordination of reciprocal exchange (Vargo and Lusch 2017). It also underlines the ways in which individuals are influenced by their position in the service eco-system and the norms and values it embodies (Goncalves, de Silva and Teixeira 2018).

The move away from ‘value-in-use’ to ‘value-in-context’ recognises situational factors involved in value creation such as institutions, socially-constructed resources and availability of other resources (Vargo and Lusch 2012). By way of an extension to this idea, ‘value-in-cultural-context’ emphasises the influence of symbolic and social components of context and the complexities of dynamic social systems (Akaka, Vargo and Lusch 2013). Vargo and Lusch (2016) also now recognise in the addition of their fifth axiom that institutions and institutional arrangements play a central role in fostering co-operative and co-ordinated behaviour as part of the service ecosystem through their rules, norms and beliefs which control social action. The significance of the social

context of value co-creation and resource integration is emphasised by Edvardsson, Skalen and Tronvoll (2012) and the phrase 'value-in-social-context' is proposed to recognise the social construction of value, the actor-driven process involved, and the influence of social structures, systems and practices on value co-creation (Edvardsson, Tronvoll and Gruber 2011).

An alternative approach is the more linear service-profit chain model, which offers a different conceptualisation of value creation from that outlined above, but similarly views the process of value creation as an integrated system in which various elements play their part. Heskett et al. (2008) describe the process starting from internal service quality within the organisation which fosters employee satisfaction, loyalty and productivity, leading to external service value, customer satisfaction and loyalty, and resulting in profitability and revenue growth. In contrast to the value co-creation concept, the service-profit chain perspective views value as being created by the employees and then passed down the chain through a series of interactions and relationships.

The service-profit chain can be simplified to focus on the service triad - the customer, the contact personnel who interface between the customer and the organisation, and the service organisation – and the interdependencies and relationships between them (Cook et al. 2002). Both Heskett et al. (2008) and Cook et al. (2002) highlight the importance of a corporate culture centred on service for both employees and customers, and flag the significance of customers' emotional responses to service encounters which can be influenced by employee behaviours. The service-profit chain perspective allows organisations to identify how service design and delivery can influence the outcomes of service quality by viewing the interactions between service elements as part of a process (Hogreve et al. 2016).

3.2 Service structures and internal service provision

The concepts of the service eco-system and the interconnectedness of elements in service performance help to understand the positioning of internal service within the wider service organisation context. Taking an integrated view of the whole organisation - including its customers - allows interdependencies in the system to be recognised and understood holistically (Bitner, Ostrom and Morgan 2008). For example, the service design technique of 'service blueprinting' adopts a systems perspective by combining customers, the 'on-stage' actions of contact employees, their 'backstage' non-visible

actions, support processes and physical elements to visually render the total process of service provision, allowing all parties to recognise their roles and responsibilities (Radnor et al. 2014). This section examines internal service provision and the connection between internal and external service, as well as the staff behaviours that influence this link.

3.2.1 Internal service provision

Internal services are those provided within an organisation to enable employees to deliver results to customers (Heskett et al. 2008). An internal service is defined as "any contribution provided at some cost (effort, time, resources) by an employee to benefit a colleague in another group: enabling them to do their job, getting them out of trouble or helping them with a problem" (Llewellyn 2001:211). As part of an organisation's service climate, the quality of internal service is at least as important as external service quality in predicting service effectiveness (Schneider and Bowen 2019), and is increasingly the focus of service scholars who recognise the importance of a holistic approach (Ostrom et al. 2010; Bowen and Schneider 2014; Hogreve et al. 2016).

The service perspective outlined in Section 3.1 can be applied across service settings, but has principally been developed and tested in external service settings (Reynoso and Moores 1995). For example, Cronin and Taylor (1992) researched banking, pest control, dry cleaning and fast food, and Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) based their research on findings from financial services and product repair settings. The service concept is viewed as both an inward and an outward-looking phenomenon as part of a strategic management focus on aligning internal structures with the external view of the customer (Ostrom et al. 2015).

In measuring the quality of internal services, some studies have used generic service quality measurement approaches, equating external customers with internal ones (Duzevic, Bakovic and Stulec 2014; Sahney 2016; Smith, Smith and Clarke 2007), whilst very few have used measures specifically designed to measure internal service quality (Reynoso and Moores 1995; Ehrhart et al. 2011). The characteristics of service quality most frequently cited in these studies as being important for internal customers were reliability, competence and adaptability.

Whilst some of the core elements and concepts – quality, value, satisfaction – are the same whether the service is externally or internally provided, the context and relationships between customer and provider have a different basis (Ehrhart et al. 2011). For example, in a study of internal service encounters, Gremler, Bitner and Evans (1995) found that the same events and behaviours that influence the external customers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction are equally applicable to internal customers. However, they noted that whilst the experiences of internal and external customers are very similar in relation to the drivers of customer satisfaction, a crucial difference between the two groups is that the internal customer typically does not have any choice in terms of alternative products or suppliers. In these cases, the relationship between customer and provider and the outcomes in terms of customer behaviours may be different as the internal customer is constrained.

Constraints on customer choice in accessing internal services mean that these interactions are 'structurally induced' relationships (Molm, Melamed and Whitham 2013, Gremler, Bitner and Evans 1995). This is a key difference between internal and external service perspectives, as the focus of services marketing is on customer retention and loyalty, whilst internal services customers may have limited alternative options if the service quality they encounter is poor. In social exchange literature, such structurally-induced relations in which both parties would rather exchange elsewhere but have no choice are described as 'companionships of misery' to denote their negative interdependence (Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2006). As with the service eco-system concept, interdependence of the different elements in service exchange is a key characteristic of internal service quality, as colleagues rely on each other and their organisations to provide the resources they need (Dyer, Singh and Hesterly 2018).

3.2.2 Relationship between internal service and external service

The quality of internal services has been shown to be a key element in overall service quality and external customer satisfaction, as staff and organisational issues are reflected in customer satisfaction and behaviour. By satisfying the needs of internal customers, employees are equipped to satisfy the needs of external customers (Gremler, Bitner and Evans 1995). Reynoso and Moores (1995) suggest that this link is as a result of interdependencies within a service organisation such that poor internal service damages the service to the external customer. Shown in Figure 3.2, Schneider and Bowen (2019) conceptualise the link as three tiers, with the customer tier as the service

beneficiaries, the boundary tier as the point of contact between employee and customer, and the co-ordination tier where services are managed and resources organised, and this includes internal service.

Figure 3.2: The Three-tiered view of service organisations

(Schneider and Bowen 2019: 4)

Service profit chain research supports this view, showing that internal service quality influences employee productivity by ensuring operational excellence and greater efficiency (Hogreve et al. 2016). Empirical studies in healthcare (Prakash and Srivastava 2018), hospitality (Prentice 2018) and in education settings (Eldor and Shoshani 2017) confirm this link to employee attitudes and behaviours, and demonstrate improved outcomes for customers as a result. For example, Zheng et al. (2018) found that higher levels of internal service quality are associated with lower rates of preventable adverse events in patient care, and concluded that improvements in internal service quality could therefore have the same benefit for patients as increasing the number of nursing staff.

A number of researchers have explored the link between service climate and customer experience, and found that moderators of this relationship include internal service quality, interdependence and customer contact (Bowen and Schneider 2014; Ehrhart et al. 2011; Eldor and Shoshani 2017). This was particularly found to be the case for units which function independently in the normal course of their work but are dependent on centralised services, and in these cases employees draw on social and informal networks with their support service colleagues to gain easier access to these critical support services (Ehrhart et al. 2011).

3.2.3 Adaptability and staff discretion in service provision

However well a service is designed, the nature of service operations as inherently interactive and intangible means that an element of discretion on the part of service employees may be inevitable, as managerial control can be limited in certain circumstances (Kelley 1993). Organisational structures of authority and management can influence the degree of discretion available to employees according to the organisation's levels of formalisation, complexity and centralisation (Marasi, Bennett and Budden 2018). By way of illustration, Kelley (1993) identifies three forms of discretion: routine discretion, where staff can select from an agreed set of options; creative discretion, where staff have freedom to develop solutions to address needs; and deviant discretion, in which staff select actions which are not sanctioned by the organisation or are contrary to policy and usual practice. Decentralisation as a structural condition can increase the degree of creative discretion and decrease the likelihood of the organisation viewing employees' use of discretion as deviant, because they are given the operating space to determine tailored solutions to local problems.

Discretion can be found in the gap between an organisation's policies and the way in which they are implemented, meaning that a service manager's approach to how they use discretion to balance the needs of the organisation with the needs of the customer can be critical (Karlsson 2019). Karlsson (2019) argues that taking a customer-focused perspective allows managers to make the case for increased latitude of action in order to provide a better service. Discretion on the part of the contact employee plays a positive role in improving customer satisfaction, as it is based on an enhanced understanding of the customer's needs gained through interaction and the interpersonal relationship (Gwinner et al. 2005). This is achieved through customisation of the service offering through front-line employees and as a result of adaptive behaviour motivated by the employee's service orientation. Discretion can also lead to enhanced levels of trust between provider and customer because it indicates personal motivations and intentions which signify commitment to the relationship (Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily 2003).

Job autonomy can play a moderating role in service quality, as it provides scope for contact employees to use their discretion and engage in organisational citizenship behaviours such as conscientiousness, altruism, and courtesy, to positively influence service quality (Bell and Menguc 2002). Proactivity on the part of the service provider has similar positive effects on internal collaboration as it indicates attention to the needs

of customers and the commitment of the provider to promoting their interests (Murphy and Coughlan 2018).

3.2.4 Relations between colleagues

In service settings, the service as experienced by the customer combines elements from a number of different service providers or parts of the organisation, such that co-ordination of the whole service experience becomes part of the challenge for service quality (Gittell 2000, 2002). As with the link between external and internal service quality, Gittell (2002) found that provider-to-provider relationships facilitated provider-to-customer relationships, and that the two links could have simultaneous and independent effects on customer outcomes. The three key elements needed for such relational co-ordination are identified as shared knowledge (a cognitive driver), shared goals (a motivational driver) and mutual respect (a social driver). These mutually reinforcing elements are particularly critical when there are high levels of interdependence between colleagues and when time is constrained, and communications between colleagues both affect and are affected by these drivers.

Relational co-ordination in internal service relationships between colleagues relies on the social structures of trust, co-operation and commitment, and shared expectations of reciprocity. Llewellyn (2001) found that service providers and service customers had both transactional and relational expectations of each other in terms of competency, flexibility, fairness, trust and respect. When these expectations are not met, this can have implications for the goodwill and co-operative behaviours between colleagues which aid the smooth running of the organisation. Breakdowns of these interdependent relationships can have far-reaching consequences for service quality, customer satisfaction and job satisfaction (Gremler, Bitner and Evans 1995; Colbert, Bono and Purvanova 2016). In linking the service perspective with the interpersonal relationships between colleagues, these scholars recognise the social and psychological dimensions at play in internal service provision, and these are of direct relevance for this thesis. Relationship quality in service provision is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, Section 4.3 below.

3.3 Service in the HE sector

Service literature covering the HE sector predominantly focuses on students as customers, with only a small number of studies considering the internal customer and

the role of internal service in students' perceptions of service quality (Khan and Matlay 2009; Sahney 2016; Sharif and Kassim 2012). Across the literature, there is a lack of consistency in defining the customer and this is seen as a barrier to service quality improvement (Quinn et al. 2009). Some studies concentrate on students as the customer (e.g. Sultan and Wong 2012, 2013; Clark, Fine and Scheuer 2017), whilst others take a broader perspective recognising the state and society as the stakeholders (Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno 2008). Examples of these diverse approaches include a system level approach which views the state as customer through its role as funder and regulator (Agasisti and Castalano 2006), identification of students as co-creators of value through engagement with teaching and learning (Diaz-Mendez and Gummesson 2012), and an exploration of the role of personal values in student perceptions of service quality (Durvasula, Lysonski and Madhavi 2011).

In the studies focusing on internal customers and the nature of their experience in the HE sector, customers were recognised as being both academic and non-academic staff (Small 2008; Smith, Smith and Clarke 2007). Academic staff are usually seen as service providers in the academic-student relationship, but as internal customers their work environment and job satisfaction can be determinants of the service quality that they subsequently provide to students (Duzevic, Bakovic and Stulec 2014). Non-academic service providers can be seen as part of the service-profit chain, and the services provided to internal customers can drive the quality of external customer service (Sharif and Kassim 2012; Al-Kilani and Twaissi 2017). For example, in a study of the contributions of professional staff to student outcomes, Graham and Regan (2016) noted the significance of valued working relationships, effective partnership working and collaboration between staff across the university in producing positive student outcomes.

3.3.1 Measuring service quality in HE

Pressure on resources and the need to ensure effective use of institutional resources drives much of the work in universities to measure service quality (Casu and Thanassoulis 2006). For instance, increased student numbers can be seen to have an impact on service quality (Giannakis and Bullivant 2016), and student satisfaction with administrative services can influence their overall satisfaction with their university experience (Soutar and MacNiel 1996, Roberts 2018).

The SERVQUAL tool (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985) has been used successfully to evaluate service quality and customer satisfaction in HE, and to focus attention on service gaps and priorities for improvement (Sahney 2016; Smith, Smith and Clarke 2007). As a variation of SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor 1992), the HE-specific measurement tool HEdPERF was shown to perform better than the general SERVPERF tool in explaining variances in service quality (Abdullah 2005) as a result of the context-sensitive measures included such as student, academic and programme factors. HEdPERF measures service quality in HE from the student perspective but it has not prevailed as the dominant methodology in HE service quality measurement, as SERVQUAL and SERVPERF are equally frequently deployed (Silva et al. 2017).

In measuring services to students, student perceptions of service quality of central administrative services have been compared with the importance to the students of various service attributes, with most important being staff courtesy, competence and ease of access (Arena, Arnaboldi and Azzone 2010). Another study used a critical incident technique to identify circumstances leading to customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with service encounters and to understand the consequences of service failure (Chahal and Devi 2013). A number of studies have examined the use and usefulness of more corporate quality improvement programmes in the HE sector such as Total Quality Management, Six Sigma methodologies and Business Process Improvement, and found varying degrees of effectiveness (Quinn et al. 2009; Sunder 2016; Ciancio 2018). Finally, studies considering the measurement and management of staff performance in achieving service quality have focused on HR practices and tools in influencing staff behaviours (Alach 2017; Arena et al. 2009).

In keeping with the literature on service climate and internal service, a systemic view of service performance is needed in universities as the functional specialism in these institutions can make the customer experience more challenging (Dunnion and O'Donovan 2014). An understanding of the roles of the three tiers in HE service quality – customer tier, boundary tier and co-ordination tier – as well as the relationships and interdependencies involved is also vital (Sharabi 2013).

3.3.2 Quality in university administrative services

The quality of university administrative services has been researched from both a student and staff customer perspective, enabling comparisons between the needs of these

customer groups (Sharif and Kassim 2012; Al-Kilani and Twaissi 2017; Galloway 1998). In Smith, Smith and Clarke (2007), customers of IT Services department valued reliability more than any other factor, and there was little difference between the groups in the drivers of customer satisfaction. Smith, Smith and Clarke (2007) also noted that in internal services the outcomes of poor service can be just as damaging as for an external service, but are experienced through time spent handling complaints, low staff morale leading to absenteeism, high turnover and recruitment difficulties, and reputational damage. Whilst customer retention is less of a driver in internal service, the costs of negative performance can still have financial penalties.

Studies have demonstrated that the quality of university administrative services can influence student outcomes, such as drop-out rates and satisfaction with the student experience (Al-Kilani and Twaissi 2017; Gillespie 2018). Meeting the needs of internal customers to ensure they are motivated, satisfied employees who take pride in their work is flagged as critical for the delivery of excellent service to external customers (Khan and Matlay 2009). As in the literature linking internal and external service quality outlined in Chapter 3 Section 3.2.2, a positive internal service culture plays a key role at a system level. When high levels of interdependence exist and there is a need for close co-operation in order for staff to perform their job roles effectively, communication, information sharing and collaboration are critical factors (Lintz 2008). Similarly, Sharif and Kassim (2012) highlight the importance of a conducive internal service climate in fostering a positive external service climate. These findings for the HE sector point to the importance of mutual trust in the service relationship as an antecedent to service quality (Smith, Smith and Clarke 2007), and echo the findings in the broader service literature about the relationship between internal and external service quality.

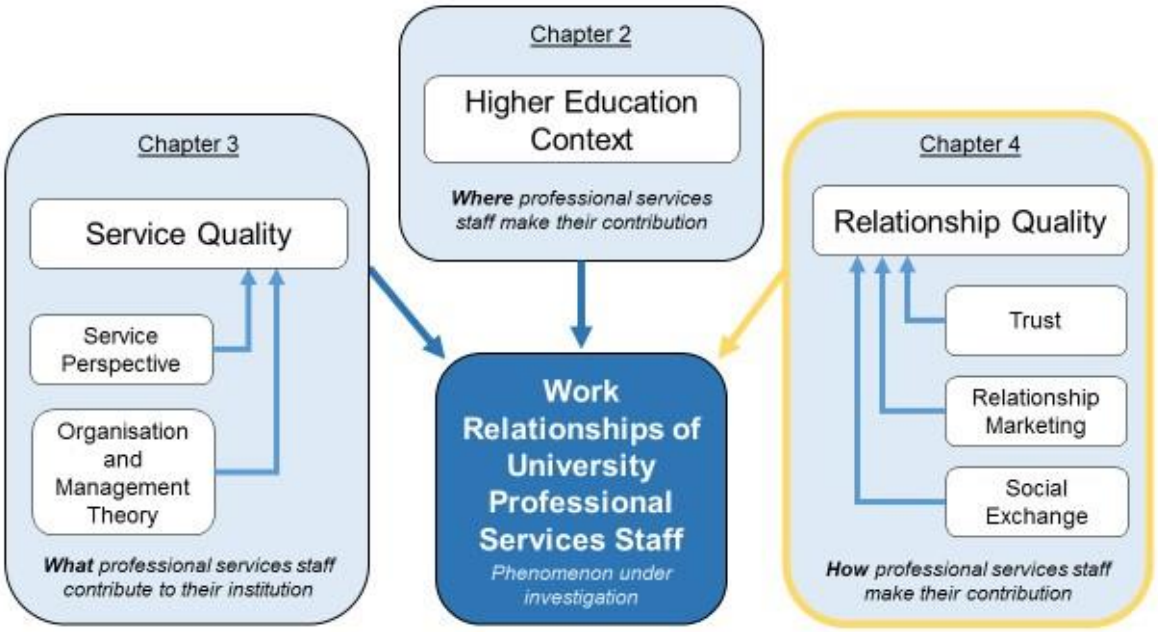
Chapter summary

The service perspective and theoretical contributions of the service-dominant logic literature provide valuable contextual background for this current research in an internal service setting. This chapter outlined the key concepts of service, value and quality, examining the implications of these for internal service settings and their application in the HE context. The concept of value co-creation aligns well with the collaborative collegial relationships of university professional services staff, as does the service ecosystem perspective which frames the interdependencies of internal and external service within the university. Interdependency in the delivery of support services is

recognised as an influencing factor on the interpersonal dynamics of the customer / provider relationship, and the co-ordinating role of institutions and institutional arrangements are experienced in universities through governance structures and degrees of centralisation, both of which have been shown to affect service experience.

The primacy of the customer as the ultimate judge of value through their perceptions of service quality is supported by approaches to service measurement detailed in the literature and informs the operationalisation of this current study. Throughout the literature reviewed there is frequent reference to the role of relationships between individuals in service quality, whether in the perceptions, expectations, satisfaction or behaviours of customers, or in the recognition of competence, reliability, discretion, organisational citizenship behaviours and adaptability of providers. The significance of these interpersonal relationships for internal service quality is readily apparent in the attention given to the concepts of trust, loyalty, reciprocity, mutual respect and commitment. However, there has been limited consideration in the service literature of the role of such relationships between colleagues in effective internal service, and of how they affect and are affected by service experience. The nature and quality of these working relationships are explored in greater depth in Chapter 4, from the perspectives of trust and relationship quality.

CHAPTER 4: THE WORK RELATIONSHIPS OF UNIVERSITY SUPPORT STAFF



This study is principally concerned with the interpersonal relationship between service provider and service user, in a university setting. It focuses on the relationship dynamics of these interactions, and the ways in which service experience is influenced by - and influences – the ongoing working relationship between the two parties. The two previous chapters establish the context of these interactions: the HE sector in which the relationships are situated and play out, and the service context which underpins the purpose and nature of the relationships between customer and provider in an internal service setting. This chapter turns to focus on the relationship itself and identifies theoretical contributions which are relevant to this present study. Initially, the specific roles and experiences of university support staff as service providers are explored, highlighting aspects pertinent to this study such as professional identity and power relations. The review then examines theoretical perspectives provided by three strands of literature which are key to this present research into workplace relationships: trust, relationship quality and social exchange.

4.1 The role of support staff in Higher Education

The themes identified in Chapter 2 (complexity and diversity, managerialism, leadership, authority and control, and organisational culture), provide the context to employee relations and the conditions which influence values, behaviours and attitudes. Turning now to the individual employee level, there is a growing body of work specifically focused on employee relations in higher education settings covering workplace environment, professional identity and relationships between staff groups. This literature is summarised by theme in Table 4.1, which shows how the papers are concentrated in these areas.

The literature search extended worldwide and uncovered scholarship from Australian, US, UK, South African, Scandinavian and Indian contexts. Of the papers focusing on professional services staff in universities, a significant proportion of research papers published 15 to 20 years ago examined conditions and experiences in the Australian HE sector (e.g. Dobson and Conway 2003; Mcinnis 1998; Pitman 2000; Szekeres 2004), particularly in relation to tensions between staff groups. This body of literature from the Australian context is included in the analysis below as it illustrates the potential for problematic work relationships between staff groups. However, it may not reflect current conditions in the UK sector, nor the developments in contemporary Australian Higher Education.

Power relations between academic and non-academic staff groups are frequently referred to (e.g. Dobson and Conway 2003; Szekeres 2006), particularly in relation to the positioning of decision-making authority (Allen-Collinson 2009; Mcinnis 1998). As might be expected in a less well-established profession, issues of professional identity for support staff are also significantly represented in the literature (e.g. Whitchurch 2006, 2008; Enders and Naidoo 2018; Kolsaker 2014; Regan and Graham 2018) as roles evolve and boundaries between staff groups become blurred. Finally, the relationships between staff groups in the context of service delivery and co-operation emerge as a core theme, with the longevity of relationships going beyond a simple buyer-seller model such that ongoing reciprocity and co-operation become more important in maintaining well-functioning relationships (Small 2008; Pitman 2000).

Table 4.1: Thematic review of university professional services staff literature

Topic	Examples of relevant papers	Key themes
Relations with other staff	Deem (2010); Dobson (2000); Dobson and Conway (2003); Graham and Regan (2016); Gray (2015); Mcinnis (1998); McNay (2005); Pitman (2000); Small (2008); Szekeres (2011); Veles, Carter and Boon (2018); Wohlmuther (2008)	Tensions between academic and non-academic staff; increased professionalisation of support roles and changing expectations; undervaluing of expertise of administrators; significance of shared values and goals in positive staff relations; role of structural factors and interpersonal relationships in overcoming barriers to co-operation.
Professional identity	Allen-Collinson (2009); Berkovich and Wasserman (2017); Cox and Verbaan (2016); Gornitzka and Larsen (2004); Kolsaker (2014); Regan and Graham (2018); Ryttberg and Geschwind (2017); Sebalj, Holbrook and Bourke (2012); Lauwerys (2002); Szekeres (2004); Veles and Carter (2016); Whitchurch (2006, 2008)	Nomenclature of 'non-academic staff'; professionalisation of administrative staff; divergent agendas of academic and professional staff; blurring of boundaries between two staff groups; professional staff playing interpretive, translational role.
Power and resource allocation	Allen-Collinson (2009); Farndale and Hope-Hailey (2009); Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2012); Hackman (1983); Mcinnis (1998); Parker and Jary (1995); Szekeres (2006)	Limitations on power and influence of support services; perceptions of loss of power by academic staff; increasing role of non-academic staff in management and policy decisions; significance of core or peripheral positioning of unit within university for resource allocation.
Customer service / service quality	Al-Kilani and Twaissi (2017); Baltaru (2018); Galloway (1998); Gillespie (2018); Graham (2010); Graham and Regan (2016); Martin (2008); Pitman (2000); Roberts (2018); Small (2008)	Complexity of internal and external customer bases; importance of strong interpersonal relationships to service quality; reciprocity in internal customer relations; length of relationship and degree of dependence as key variables.
Experience of work / well-being	Curran and Prottas (2017); Pick, Teo and Yeung (2012); Rosser (2004); Smerek and Peterson (2007); Szekeres (2006, 2011)	Lack of recognition for professional skills and contribution; professionalisation of administrative roles; negative perceptions of support staff; impact of job satisfaction on productivity.

In the UK, 51% of university staff are in non-academic roles (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2017) and thus the relevance of the literature on support staff experiences is

apparent. A thematic analysis of the literature retrieved for the review shows that this staff group is significantly under-represented (see Appendix 1 for full table of papers reviewed). Of the 175 articles reviewed, around half were broad studies across all staff categories or at institutional level, a third focused exclusively on academic staff experiences and views, and the remainder specifically addressed support staff issues. There were more than twice the number of papers focused exclusively on academic staff as there were on support staff. The thematic focus of studies is also revealing in terms of priorities of researchers. For papers addressing academic staff concerns, the most common themes were governance and organisational structures, managerialism and organisational culture, whilst for papers addressing support staff issues, the most common themes were employee relations, professional identity and co-operation. This indicates that both the roles and concerns of professional services staff are under-represented in current literature on Higher Education.

4.1.1 Professional identity

In a rapidly changing university context in which staff must adapt to internal and external challenges and altered power dynamics (Burnes, Wend and By 2014; Whitchurch and Gordon 2013), staff inevitably reassess their role, identity and positioning within their institution (Stensaker 2018; Veles and Carter 2016). Whilst academic professional identity is currently undergoing change (McKenna and Boughey 2014; Rowlands 2018), it is better defined and less contested compared to that of professional support staff (Kolsaker 2014). Studies of academic staff roles focus on how individuals interpret their academic identities in the light of experience and sectoral changes (Diamond and Rush 2012; Nickson 2014). Meanwhile, there is a growing body of research concerning the occupational identities and motivations of support staff which are varied and diverse, and undergoing significant revision in the light of changes and challenges in the HE sector (Gillespie 2018; Graham 2010; Gray 2015; Sebalj, Holbrook and Bourke 2012; Szekeres 2011; Veles and Carter 2016; Whitchurch 2008).

A key problem in defining the occupational identity of university support staff is that of nomenclature. Traditionally this staff category was described as ‘non-academic staff’ which only describes what these staff are not, rather than what they do (Szekeres 2006), and is potentially divisive (MacFarlane 2015). More recently, the terms ‘general staff’ or ‘administration’ have been used, and now a preference has emerged for the term ‘professional staff’ as better reflecting the aspirations of this staff group (Sebalj, Holbrook

and Bourke 2012). The lack of a clear definition, the diverse nature of functions in which these staff are involved, and the relative invisibility of their contribution leads to support staff being unrecognised or unappreciated for their expertise and skills (Mcinnis 1998; Rosser 2004; Szekeres 2004).

The traditional view of support staff as subservient with no influence over management or policy is being revised as changes in job roles and organisational business needs have led to a new breed of professionals on campus who work across administrative and academic boundaries, blending functions and spanning hierarchies in broader translational, management or project roles (Whitchurch 2006, 2008; Allen-Collinson 2009; Lauwerys 2002). As such roles increasingly become professionalised, their functions and relationships with other constituents on campus are continuously being negotiated and redefined (Gornitzka and Larsen 2004), and they enjoy greater role autonomy (Regan and Graham 2018). Often in highly visible, front-line roles, professional support staff now have a role in constructing the identity of the institution through embodying organisational values in their interactions with prospective students and community stakeholders (Small 2008; Roberts 2018).

4.1.2 Power relations

The developing and strengthening of the professional identities of support staff can lead to concern that administrative functions are encroaching on areas traditionally controlled by the academic community, and these changes in power dynamics underpin tensions between the two staff groups (Szekeres 2011; Kolsaker 2014; Whitchurch 2008). The view that support staff should act only to implement the will of the academy still persists in some quarters (Gray 2015; Ryttberg and Geschwind 2017), with growth in the responsibilities and accountability of support staff seen as “the tail wagging the dog” (Waugh 1998; Allen-Collinson 2009). In an era of developing professionalisation and specialisation of support functions and roles, this attitude is being challenged (Mcinnis 1998; Deem 2010). However, the sense that power and privilege is being wrested from academic control compounds these difficult relations (Dobson and Conway 2003; Mcinnis 1998), and support staff can be negatively associated with managerialism and as instruments of corporatisation (Szekeres 2006). This point is underlined by Gray (2015) who found that local professional staff were held in much higher regard by academic colleagues who appreciated their role in lowering administrative burdens than

those based in centralised, more remote services who were seen to add to academics' administrative workload.

Whilst the balance of power between academic and professional services staff may have shifted to some degree, the studies concerning resource allocation and political power in universities, as mentioned above, show the continuing primacy of academic units in accessing institutional resources, with support services such as international student support, research support and personnel functions struggling to gain access to funding and being viewed as of secondary importance (Allen-Collinson 2009; Forbes-Mewett and Nyland 2012; Farndale and Hope-Hailey 2009). However, the emergence of 'third pillar' activities on campus – activities complementary to teaching and research such as community engagement, knowledge transfer, consultancy and commercial ventures – is one area where professional services staff can potentially carve a role for themselves, as these fields are not exclusively the domain of academic staff (Whitchurch 2008; Veles, Carter and Boon 2018).

4.1.3 Tensions between staff groups

As the questions of identity and power in Section 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 above imply, a key concern articulated in Higher Education literature on the role of support staff in universities is the quality of their relationships with academic colleagues. Characterised and experienced as a binary relationship (Dobson 2000; Dobson and Conway 2003; Sebalj, Holbrook and Bourke 2012), and with polarised or divergent values and goals (Whitchurch 2006; Gray 2015), the tensions, conflict and dysfunction which can be found in these relationships negatively affect support staff job satisfaction and morale, and can compromise the ability of universities to implement strategic change (Mcinnis 1998).

The interface between the two staff groups is beset by misunderstanding and misinterpretation of roles and work practices by both groups, sometimes wilfully as stereotypes are applied (Dobson and Conway 2003). Academics are seen by support staff as difficult to work with as they are "reluctant to be satisfied customers of administrative services" (Small 2008: 177) whilst administrative staff are viewed by academics with contempt due to perceptions of bureaucratic rigidity (Pitman 2000). Given the potential for conflict and opposing positions, the importance of strong interpersonal relationships in overcoming initial prejudices and fostering appreciation between staff groups cannot be overstated (Gray 2015).

In addition to the dimensions of identity, power and control, the tensions in interpersonal relationships between the two staff groups can also be seen to originate in structural factors such as reward structures and organisational positioning. Academic staff are rewarded for independence and individualism whilst support staff are valued for efficiency, effectiveness, teamwork and compliance, resulting in differing priorities, motivations and values as each is rewarded for different qualities (Szekeres 2011). Similarly, the positioning of roles affects the quality of working relationships, such that staff in more centralised roles feel the effects of the divide between academic and support staff more acutely than those based in academic departments who have a better understanding and appreciation of the complementarity of each other's roles (Wohlmuther 2008; Gray 2015).

A further complication is that professional support staff are not a homogenous staff group and tensions also exist between the various functions and professions in different parts of the institution in the same way as tensions exist between academic disciplines (Szekeres 2011). Professional support staff in universities navigate a complex web of ongoing service relationships with other support services which are reciprocal and interdependent and which operate against a backdrop of organisational politics and competition for authority and resources (Pick, Teo and Yeung 2012). Intra-group tensions can be felt more keenly as there is a greater underlying expectation of having shared values and goals (Small 2008).

4.2 Interpersonal trust and co-operation

The tensions outlined in Section 4.1 above illustrate the territory that staff in universities navigate every working day. Even without such challenges, universities are inherently complex organisations with diverse inputs, outputs and processes in a context of continuous change (Allen 2003; Shattock 2013; Prysor and Henley 2018). With high levels of autonomy, multiple sub-units and diverse disciplinary traditions, there is potential for a multitude of different goals, values and cultures on campus (Davis, Rensburg and Venter 2016; Sporn 1996). Staff in both academic and administrative positions also have a high degree of discretion in exercising their professional judgement through their work (Kolsaker 2014; McKenna and Boughey 2014; Gonzales 2015). Combine this diversity and autonomy with an imperative for effective collaboration in a

highly interdependent, relational setting (Diamond and Rush 2012), and the importance of constructive, co-operative workplace relationships is readily apparent.

Trust plays a key role in the development of co-operation in organisations and between individuals and groups (Dirks and Ferrin 2001; Ferrin, Bligh and Kohles 2008). Trust is a vital component in effective working relationships (Colquitt, Scott and LePine 2007), facilitating the formation of cohesive teams capable of knowledge-sharing, collaboration and interdisciplinary ways of working (Jonasson, Normann and Lauring 2014; Newell and Swan 2000). In fostering improved collaborative relationships, trust can play a role in breaking down barriers between functional departments within an organisation, particularly in times of challenge (Massey and Kyriazis 2007). For these reasons, this present research uses the lens of trust to explore the working relationships of professional services staff in a university setting.

This section outlines the character and conceptualisations of interpersonal and organisational trust and explores their treatment in trust literature. The understanding of interpersonal trust as a dyadic relationship - that is, between two individuals - provides a simple process model which allows the multiple dimensions of trust to be explored, along with the complexities of human relationships. Much organisational trust research takes the concept of interpersonal trust and either contextualises it in an organisational setting, or uses it as a basis for developing an understanding of trust in the organisation through trust transfer or impersonal trust mechanisms. The role of trust in organisations is examined in Section 4.2.7.

4.2.1 Defining trust

Trust has been described as an act of faith in people, relationships and social institutions (Sheppard and Sherman 1998) and as a phenomenon that promotes ethical behaviour (Castaldo, Premazzi and Zerbini 2010). At the macro-level, trust can be seen as a condition of stable society (Rotter 1967), and as an essential element of strong democracy and efficient markets (Carlin and Love 2013). Several studies (e.g. Castaldo, Premazzi and Zerbini 2010; Arnott 2007; Hosmer 1995; Lewicki, Tomlinson and Gillespie 2006) have reviewed the varied definitions of trust in order to arrive at common definition or common understanding of the key elements involved. Definitions have tended to fall into two camps: those which view trust as a rational, cognitive choice (e.g. Hardin 1993; Gambetta 1988; Butler 1991; Sheppard and Sherman 1998) and those which see trust

as a psychological state (e.g. Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995; Rousseau et al. 1998; Kramer 1999). Nonetheless, there are common themes across the various conceptualisations of trust.

The first common theme views trust as involving an expectation or anticipation of the behaviour or actions of others (Rotter 1971). This expectation can be refined to positive or confident expectations that a person can be relied upon (McAllister 1995; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Cummings and Bromiley 1996). For example, to Lewicki, McAllister and Bies (1998: 439) trust is "confident positive expectations regarding another's conduct". In some definitions the expectations are broadened out to include motivations of others and not just their behaviour, such as in Ring and Van de Ven's (1992) definition of trust as confidence in another person's goodwill.

The second common theme through trust definitions is a willingness on the part of the trustor to be vulnerable. This is an attitudinal concept allowing for the influence of others and potential for lack of control, and recognition of the personal vulnerabilities inherent in trusting behaviours (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995; Nienaber, Hofeditz and Romeike 2015). These definitions focus on the relational nature of trust and highlight the importance of trust in situations which demand co-operation and interdependence (Johnson-George and Swap 1982). The decision to trust should also be entered into voluntarily, with internally-motivated trust and co-operation seen as stemming from attitudes and values (Tyler 2003).

Combining these two themes, a definition of trust emerges as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995: 712). (The issue of the relationship between trust and control in organisations is discussed in Section 4.2.7 below). This definition introduces the element of risk: Some scholars explicitly include risk in their definition of trust where trust is seen as an acceptance of risks in a relationship (e.g. Sheppard and Sherman 1998) or it is implied through the concept of vulnerability as referred to in the Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) definition in the potential for lack of control.

Whilst there are various conceptualisations and theories as to the nature of the relationship between risk and trust, there is a strong link between the two constructs. For example, trust is seen as vital in managing relational risk (Nooteboom 2007), and as a mirror-image of risk, where a high level of trust reflects a perceived low level of risk and vice versa (Das and Teng 2004). Ermisch et al. (2009) found that the decision to trust differs according to perceptions and attitude to risk, whilst another study found trust decisions are not closely connected to a person's risk attitudes but may be more affected by emotional elements such as betrayal aversion (Houser, Schunk and Winter 2010). These findings bring the concept of the trust dilemma to the fore, illustrating that in trusting there is often a balancing act involving perceptions of the likely risks and rewards (Johnson-George and Swap 1982; Gundlach and Cannon 2010). Risk is an inherent feature of interdependency and reliance on others (Currall and Inkpen 2002), and the nature of interdependence will shape the risks in the relationship as well as the measures for mitigating vulnerability (Sheppard and Sherman 1998).

4.2.2 The nature and dimensions of trust

As outlined above, the various definitions of trust emphasise different characteristics and conditions, and scholars have recognised the importance of aligning measurements of trust with the definition and conceptualisation used, whether trust is seen an individual behaviour, a feature of interpersonal transactions or an institutional phenomenon (e.g. Lewicki, Tomlinson and Gillespie 2006; Dietz and Hartog 2006). Trust is now widely accepted as a multidimensional and multifaceted construct (Butler 1991; Arnott 2007; Robinson 1996).

Trust has been researched as a rational, cognitive phenomenon (e.g. Jones and George 1998; Doney and Cannon 1997) and also as a construct with affective and behavioural components which are influenced by emotions (Williams 2007; Dun and Schweitzer 2005). Many scholars have differentiated between cognitive trust based on reason and affective trust based on underlying feelings and emotions, in order to clarify the scope of their research and to be explicit about the dimensions of trust discussed (e.g. McAllister 1995; Rousseau et al. 1998). Massey, Wang and Kyngdon (2018), for example, consider affective trust to be more potent in intra-firm exchange relationships than cognitive trust, but advocate for both types of trust to be identified in trust research.

Trust can be experienced at different levels - individual, group, organisational, societal - and because trust is underpinned by multi-level processes it is appropriate for research to take a multi-level view of trust (Rousseau et al. 1998). Trust can have direct effects as well as indirect effects as a moderator or mediator for other factors, such as in Dirks (1999) which found that trust has an indirect effect on group performance through its influence on motivation and group dynamics. Trust in work teams resides at multiple levels simultaneously, and is influenced by individual, team and organisational dynamics (Costa, Fulmer and Anderson 2018).

In trust measurement literature there has been a collective attempt to document the process of trust development and the evolution of trust. In simple, linear terms, the process starts with antecedents of trust which include the situational conditions and the propensity or disposition of the trustor to trust, as well as an assessment by the trustor of the trustworthiness of the trustee (Colquitt, Scott and Le Pine 2007; Das and Teng 2004; Schoorman, Mayer and Davis 2007). These antecedents then lead to a trust intention and trust decision, potentially resulting in trusting behaviours, which themselves lead to particular outcomes resulting from the establishment of a trusting relationship (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995).

Trust is far more dynamic and cyclical than this linear description implies, as the outcomes of trusting behaviour affect future perceptions of trustworthiness, and trust relationships evolve over time (Inkpen and Currall 2004; Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995; Ferrin, Bligh and Kohles 2008). For example, McKnight, Cummings and Cervany (1998) explored differences in bases of trust at different stages in relationships, with a particular focus on initial trust formation where experience and information about the trustee is limited, and hence there is a greater reliance on trust disposition and institutional cues. Vanneste, Purunam and Kretschmer (2013) similarly look at the dynamics and mechanisms of trust development over time.

When looking at the cyclical nature of trust, reciprocity emerges as a potential outcome and as a basic human behaviour, with the norm of reciprocity playing a key role in the dynamics of trust relationships (Serva, Fuller and Mayer 2005; Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe 1995). Reciprocity is viewed by some as a synonym for trustworthiness (Carlin and Love 2013), although it is also recognised that whilst there is the potential for trust

to be a mutual or reciprocal phenomenon, this is not necessarily always the case (Schoorman, Mayer and Davis 2007).

4.2.3 Antecedents of trust

Focusing on trust formation, Butler (1991) made a distinction between the dimensions of trust and the conditions or determinants which foster a trust relationship, and developed a Conditions of Trust Inventory based on ten identified conditions. Subsequent research explored the process of trust development and considered trust as distinct from trustworthiness (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995; Colquitt, Scott and LePine 2007; Caldwell and Clapham 2003). In Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995), a more integrative approach is taken in that the characteristics of both the trustor (propensity to trust and openness to risk) and of the trustee in terms of perceived trustworthiness, as well as the situational backdrop, are seen as crucial in understanding trust relationships. This work defined measures for perceptions of trustworthiness as ability, benevolence and integrity, highlighting the importance of technical or professional expertise as well as personal characteristics and motivations. This research has been drawn upon by subsequent studies which have explored the relative importance of different dimensions of trustworthiness to different stakeholders in different situations (e.g. Pirson and Malhotra 2011).

Kramer (1999) also outlines multiple bases of trust, identifying disposition-based trust, history-based trust stemming from prior experience, category-based trust, rule-based trust, role-based trust and trust based on experience or information from third parties. Much management and leadership research has considered ways in which perceptions of trustworthiness can be improved. For example, Gawley (2007) explores the importance of behaviours as indicators of trustworthiness and as a means to developing trust in leaders, and generosity has been identified as a sign and signal of trustworthiness as it reveals a pro-social disposition (Gambetta and Szekely 2014).

4.2.4 Outcomes of trust

The behaviours which result from a trust decision or stem from a trusting relationship are described as behavioural trust or trust outcomes (Das and Teng 2004). Hardin (1993) goes as far as to say that trust is meaningless unless it is acted on – that without the ensuing trust behaviour, it is only a trust intention or propensity with no bearing on the relationship. As outlined above, the mutuality of trust and co-operative relationships is

evident in looking at trust outcomes, as perceptions and judgements are reciprocated and adapted in the light of experience (Ferrin, Bligh and Kohles 2008). Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) describe a feedback loop with the outcomes of a trust decision informing future trustworthiness perceptions.

In a workplace setting, the majority of organisational trust scholars connect trust with highly positive effects on performance in the workplace (Lane and Bachman 1998; De Jong, Dirks and Gillespie 2016; Brown et al. 2015). Trust is seen as directly influencing work attitudes (Aryee, Budhwar and Chen 2002) and co-operative behaviours (Purcell 2014). Benefits include reduced transaction costs due to a reduced need for close monitoring and supervision, the fostering of prosocial behaviours, better job satisfaction and job performance, easier co-ordination and co-operation of staff, and increased incidence of organisational citizenship behaviours (Kramer 1999, 2010). A greater willingness to take risks is also identified (Colquitt, Scott and LePine 2007) as are positive effects on a business unit's competitive advantage (Davis et al. 2000). Hughes et al. (2018) found that trust plays a significant role in enabling innovation in the workplace, as individuals are more confident in engaging in entrepreneurial activities.

4.2.5 Problems with trust

Whilst trust is seen to reduce transaction costs because it diminishes the need for monitoring, there is also a cost in creating and maintaining trusting relationships, even if these are seen as a long-term investment (Puranam and Vanneste 2009). Trust is perceived to be a positive concept but trust can be counterproductive if it leads to insularity and perceptions of invulnerability (Fang et al. 2008). Likewise, misplaced or surfeit trust (McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer 2003) and blind trust (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995) can be problematic if risks are not appropriately taken into account.

A number of studies have explored instances of excessive trust where shareholders and advisers have been complacent and this has led to infamous corporate scandals such as in the case of Enron (Currall and Epstein 2003; Kramer 2009). These cases underline the fragility of trust and that it is far easier and quicker to destroy than to create. Approaches to restoring trust after trust violation are helped through an understanding of the antecedents of trust in order to re-establish trustworthiness (Sitkin and Roth 1993; Gillespie and Dietz 2009; Kramer and Lewicki 2010). These studies also emphasise the importance of congruence in aligning values and behaviours to signal trustworthiness.

Indeed, Sitkin and Roth (1993) highlight the difficulty in restoring trust if value incongruence is not addressed, and the potential for incongruence to increase distrust if inappropriate mechanisms are used.

A consideration of the problems with trust inevitably leads to a discussion of distrust, a concept closely related to trust which can also be conceptualised in different ways. Some see the relationship as a spectrum with trust at one end and distrust at the other (Jones and George 1998; Schoorman, Mayer and Davis 2007), while others see trust and distrust as related constructs which can co-exist and operate independently (Lewicki, McAllister and Bies 1998; Sitkin and Roth 1993). In this latter conceptualisation, an absence of trust does not imply the presence of distrust, and the removal of cause for distrust does not necessarily facilitate the emergence of trust (Lewicki, McAllister and Bies 1998).

Distrust is viewed as more problematic than a lack of trust because it occurs as a result of value incongruence and stems from the affective dimension. It is therefore more fundamental and global in nature than a task-specific trust violation which leads to a withdrawal of trust rather than active distrust (Sitkin and Roth 1993; Jones and George 1998). The dynamics of distrust and suspicion in organisations (Kramer 1999) and between employees and employers (Robinson 1996) have also received attention in the literature. An exploration of the dynamics of trust and distrust helps to illustrate that whilst trust is generally seen as good and distrust as bad, this simplistic understanding is not always the case. Rather, optimal trust can be seen as a conditional good characterised as “prudence with a bias towards trust” (Wicks, Berman and Jones 1999: 103).

4.2.6 Disciplinary perspectives on trust

A number of studies have reviewed conceptualisations of trust from the perspective of different disciplines, predominantly in the social sciences (e.g. Rousseau et al. 1998; Fichman 2003). From a psychology perspective, trust is inherently relational and interpersonal, stemming from individual beliefs about the motives of others (Rempell, Holmes and Zanna 1985), but what interests the various disciplines is the context in which those relationships exist as well as the nature of the relationships. Concentrations of studies can be found in the fields of psychology, sociology, economics, politics, management studies, organisational science, risk management, marketing and IT, all of

which look to explore the role and characteristics of trust through these disciplinary approaches. A brief outline of the literature follows in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Treatment of trust by academic disciplines

Discipline	Examples of literature	Treatment of trust in literature
Psychology	Kramer (1999) Rotter (1967, 1980) Cadenhead and Richman (1996) Williams (2001)	Trust as a psychological state; much work in this field focuses on interpersonal trust or trust experienced at an individual level. Personality differences as key factor in perceptions of trustworthiness, and links between trust, dependability and gullibility. Extreme trust or distrust associated with personality disorders. Literature also views trust in another person as influenced by social norms and by whether someone has in-group or out-group status.
Sociology	Luhmann (1979) Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) Hardin (1993, 1996) Sitkin and Roth (1993)	Trust seen as helping to reduce the complexity of social relations. Distinction between trust and trustworthiness, and consideration of how behaviours are constrained by interpersonal, institutional and social factors. Focus on the social dimensions of trust and distrust constructs, and the associated antecedents and effects.
Economics	Fukuyama (1995a, 1995b) Gambetta (1988) Williamson (1993) Zak and Knack (2001)	At a macro-economic level, trust and related social and institutional factors are seen as promoting investment and growth, such that high trust societies have higher outputs than low trust societies because transaction costs are lower. The relationship between social capital and trust and trustworthiness of individuals and groups is seen as key in shaping society and economic organisation. Rational, calculative explanations of trust prevail in economic literature, although behavioural economics and game theory approaches consider how social norms, individual perceptions and personalities influence trust decisions. Economic approaches to trust have explored the link between trust and performance of organisations.
Politics	Mishler and Rose (2001) Carlin and Love (2013) Korczynski (2000)	Political trust research explores public trust in political institutions as well as the role of political affiliation in social relations. Role of trust in democracies in linking ordinary citizens to the institutions which represent them, as well as individual trust in politicians and parties, are key topics.
Management	Davis et al. (2000) Currall and Epstein (2003) Caldwell and Hayes (2007) Kramer (2010) Dirks and Ferrin (2001)	Trust is conceptualised as a management tool to limit opportunism and as a means to foster constructive and co-operative work attitudes and improved business performance. The behaviour, practices and attitudes of leaders are seen to directly influence perceptions of their trustworthiness, and by extension the trustworthiness of the organisations they lead.

Organisation science	Das and Teng (2001, 2004) Aryee, Budhwar and Chen (2002) Nooteboom (1996, 2007) Sitkin and George (2005) Six and Sorge (2008)	From an organisational science perspective, trust is seen as a social control mechanism, an indicator of a healthy organisation, and a key factor in the development of inter-organisational partnerships. In organisational behaviour research, the impact of trust on interdepartmental and interpersonal relationships in the workplace is explored and studies have shown how individuals can develop trust both in other individuals and at group and organisation level.
Risk management	Das and Teng (2001) Poortinga and Pidgeon (2003) Siegrist and Cvetkovich (2000)	In risk management literature the relationship between trust, risk and control is explored. Trust relationships are considered at individual and group level and can be seen to influence how risk is perceived, measured and controlled.
Marketing	Morgan and Hunt (1994) Doney and Cannon (1997) Coulter and Coulter (2002) Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002) Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2013)	Trust scholarship in the field of marketing has particularly focused on the role of trust in relationship development and buyer-seller exchange relationships, as well as links between consumer trust and consumer loyalty, and the impact of brand trust on market performance of products and services.
IT and computer science	Pavlou (2003) Josang, Ismael and Boyd (2007) McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar (2002)	Trust as an antecedent to the adoption of new technology and consumer acceptance of risk in online transactions, with consumer trust playing a pivotal role in facilitating internet transactions and electronic commerce by overcoming perceptions of risk.

Table 4.2 underscores the multidisciplinary nature of trust studies and the relevance of the construct across multiple fields, whilst highlighting the importance of context in understanding the trust phenomenon. Whilst attempts to reach an understanding of the relationship between trustor and trustee have been undertaken in many disciplines where social or interpersonal factors are involved, without an integrative approach such an understanding will be only partial and incomplete (Bhattacharya, Devinney and Pillutla 1998) or will lead to a fragmented view (McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer 2003).

4.2.7 Trust in the context of organisations

Some scholars see organisational trust as interpersonal trust in an organisational setting, i.e. between individuals (e.g. Dietz and Hartog 2006; Svensson 2018). There is also some debate about whether trust can be formed at a group or team level (e.g. Caldwell

and Clapham 2003), while in other research the term 'organisational trust' describes a trustor's decision to trust an organisation as a whole (e.g. Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone 1998). Whatever the view, trust is a phenomenon which makes working in complex organisations easier and collaboration possible (Ferrin, Bligh and Kohles 2008), and is a defining feature of productive workplace relationships (Costa 2003; Baer et al. 2018). In fast-paced, dynamic, distributed workplaces where management styles are more participative and uncertainty is a feature of everyday life, trust is seen as a more appropriate control mechanism than hierarchical power or direct surveillance (Lane and Bachman 1998: 31). In particular, the traditional organising model of command and control is unsuitable in more relational settings such as universities, where connections between people and groups are dynamic and rapidly-changing, and where there is a greater reliance on trust as an effective co-ordination method (Adler 2001; Tyler 2003).

Trust research involving organisations draws on both social and economic theories, and proposes that social exchange theory is more effective at describing relationships and mutual support in organisations than economic exchange theory alone (Aryee, Budhwar and Chen 2002). Trust is conceptualised as an organising principle in the way that it structures and mobilises interactions between people, alongside other organising mechanisms such as authority (McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer 2003). Within organisations there is a complex and dynamic relationship between trust and control or governance (Ring and Van de Ven 1992; Mills and Ungson 2003), as indicated in the Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) definition of trust. Governance mechanisms provide necessary stable conditions for trust to emerge and can substitute for and complement trust relationships (Nooteboom 2007). However, research also shows that in certain situations control and governance can crowd out individual discretion, hence reducing conditions for trust to emerge (Puranam and Vanneste 2009). A person's role autonomy – the extent to which they are free to act and use personal judgement and discretion – affects trust of that individual by others, with constraints on role autonomy resulting in lower levels of trust (Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily 2003).

Recognising that trust relationships in organisations do not develop in isolation from the surrounding environment, research demonstrates how trust can be transferred from a known trusted person to an unknown person as a result of their association at some level (McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer 2003; Doney and Cannon 1997; Johnson and Grayson 2005). Third party relationships also affect interpersonal trust in that observing how

others trust an individual influences another's perceptions of trustworthiness of that individual (Ferrin, Dirks and Shah 2006). Research illustrates how an employee's inclination to trust others can be influenced by perceptions of fairness in the workplace and the daily treatment received from coworkers (Baer et al. 2019). This phenomenon is pertinent to the study of service usage, particularly when a decision to use a service is based on reputation. Likewise, trust can be generalised in an organisation's members, rather than a specific other person (Kramer 2010; Frederiksen 2019). This indirect, impersonal form of trust can be useful in complex organisational settings where a history of interpersonal interaction is not always available, such as in virtual or distributed teams (Kramer and Lewicki 2010; Vanhala, Puumalainen and Blomqvist 2011).

Also relevant for a study of service use experience is the literature on buyer-supplier exchange relationships, where customers make decisions as to whether to trust an organisation to fulfil their needs. In these situations, trust is a key determinant of relationship commitment, customer loyalty and effectiveness of commercial interactions (Schurr and Ozanne 1985; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Mouzas, Hennerberg and Naude 2007; Kharouf, Lund and Sekhon 2014; Poppo, Zhou and Li 2016). Research also shows that front-line staff and management practices and policies can influence consumer trust in relational exchanges in different ways, illustrating the combined influences of interpersonal and impersonal trust sources (Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol 2002).

Trust scholarship across the disciplines identifies and explores the various manifestations of interpersonal and organisational trust and how it both affects and is affected by human nature and behaviour. It can be difficult to separate the personal from the impersonal in matters of trust, when there are many common factors such as characteristics and perceptions of trustworthiness, risk tolerance and norms of reciprocity (Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone 1998). Conceptualisations of the different types, bases and outcomes of trust enrich the debate and clarify the concept of trust and how it is experienced by both individuals and organisations. An appreciation of the nature and role of trust enhances understanding of the interpersonal dynamics of organisational life and of the complexities involved in collaborative working relationships. Trust is an underpinning theoretical perspective in examining relationship quality, which is the focus of the next Section 4.3.

4.3 Relationship quality in service provision

Theoretical contributions in the field of relationship quality are pertinent to this current study of workplace interpersonal relationships because the focus of this body of literature is on understanding the dynamics of relationships, particularly in a workplace or business setting. Through investigation of the dimensions, antecedents and outcomes of relationship quality, the literature examines how to define and measure the quality of relationships and the impact relationship strength can have on co-operation and collaboration. Relationship quality theory considers factors at play beyond those defined in trust literature, and broadens out the exploration of interpersonal relationships in context.

Relationship quality studies analyse interpersonal relationships in action, and recent research proposes dynamic models of relationship development over time and experience (e.g. Zhang et al. 2016). Using trust theory as a core foundation, relationship quality research further operationalises theoretical constructs found in trust scholarship by setting trust alongside other relational dimensions in an exchange relationship (Jiang et al. 2016).

Palmatier et al. (2006) describe relationship quality as the most effective way to assess the strength of a relationship and to provide insight into exchange performance between two parties. High quality relationships facilitate co-operative relationships and resource exchange in the workplace, as individuals are more willing to accommodate the demands of change if they are involved in interactions based on shared obligations, respect and trust (Carter et al. 2013). Given the importance of effective collaboration between staff groups in university settings as noted in Chapter 2 and in Section 4.1 of this chapter, relationship quality literature is highly relevant to this thesis as it supports a holistic view of workplace relationships and provides a theoretical perspective which supports the operationalisation of empirical research in this area.

The findings of a review of relevant relationship quality literature are presented below. The review concentrates specifically on research of direct relevance to this current study, and explores the concept as presented in business, management and marketing literature. As the focus of this present study is on the interpersonal relationship dynamics between support service staff and their internal service users, particular attention is given

to the exploration of relationship quality in the fields of employee relations, organisational psychology, service quality, buyer-seller exchange and project management.

4.3.1 Defining relationship quality

Relationship quality is defined as a perception on the part of one party of the strength of a relationship, or as an evaluation or measurement of a connection. For example, the perception of quality is emphasised as a basic component of relationship quality by Hennig-Thurau and Klee, who define the construct as "the degree of appropriateness of a relationship to fulfil the needs of the customer associated with that relationship" (Hennig-Thurau and Klee 1997: 751). This definition rests on perceptions of customer satisfaction such that the service user defines the quality of the relationship. In Crosby, Evans and Cowles' definition, high relationship quality arises when "the customer is able to rely on the salesperson's integrity and has confidence in the salesperson's future performance because the level of past performance has been consistently satisfactory" (Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990: 70). The perception of satisfactory performance by the receiver of the service is combined with judgement of the provider's character and a view of future performance in the light of prior experience. The partner can thus be judged based on their demonstration of capability and trustworthiness, which informs perceptions of relationship quality (Subramony 2014). These definitions have clear echoes of the conceptualisation of trustworthiness proposed by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) which highlights ability, benevolence and integrity as key dimensions of trustworthiness, combining expertise with personal characteristics.

Definitions which focus on relationship quality as a conscious assessment include Palmatier's (2008: 77) definition which emphasises the evaluative nature of relationship quality across the multiple facets of the relationship such that in the aggregate it "indicates the overall calibre of the relational ties". Some definitions of relationship quality measure a combination of factors and are more value-laden in stressing the parties' judgement of the overall worth and value of the relationship to them, suggesting that a cognitive cost-benefit evaluation takes place (Scheer, Miao and Palmatier 2014).

In summary, relationship quality is a multidimensional construct which provides an overall assessment of various facets and attributes of a relationship and its working status (Palmatier et al. 2006; Jelodar, Yiu and Wilkinson 2016; Nyaga and Whipple 2011). The quality of a relationship can be contingent on wider contextual factors such

as the orientation and motivations of individuals involved, as well as wider situational factors such as relationships with colleagues and access to resources (Naude and Buttle 2000; Omilion-Hodges and Baker 2013). However, opinions differ as to the dimensions considered to comprise relationship quality (Jiang et al. 2016), and these are explored in Section 4.3.2 below.

4.3.2 Dimensions and conceptualisations of relationship quality

The elements most frequently associated with relationship quality are trust, commitment and satisfaction, particularly in buyer-seller exchange relationships (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987; Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990; Roberts, Varki and Brodie 2003).

Table 4.3 summarises the variety of conceptualisations of relationship quality in business and marketing literature, and shows the diversity of constructs viewed as dimensions, antecedents and outcomes.

Table 4.3: Conceptualisations of relationship quality in business and marketing literature

Source	Definition of relationship quality	Dimensions identified	Antecedents	Outcomes	Focus of research
Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987)	Relationship strength develops through relational exchange over time	• Trust • Shared values • Mutual investment in relationship	• Attraction • Communication • Power & justice • Norm development • Expectation development	• Commitment • Enduring relationship	Buyer-seller exchange
Crosby, Evans and Cowles (1990)	A higher order construct composed of at least two dimensions	• Trust • Customer satisfaction	• Similarity • Expertise (seller) • Relational selling behaviour	• Sales effectiveness • Anticipation of future intentions	Sales and marketing in service contexts (insurance)
Storbacka, Strandvik and Grönroos (1994)	Dynamic model of relationship quality developed by linking together service quality, customer satisfaction, relationship strength, relationship longevity and relationship profitability, and related constructs	• Purchase behaviour • Communication • Loyalty • Relationship bonds	• Service quality • Customer satisfaction	• Relationship longevity • Customer relationship profitability	Business management
Hennig-Thurau and Klee (1997)	"The degree of appropriateness of a relationship to fulfil the needs of the customer associated with that relationship" (1997: 751)	• Quality perception • Trust • Commitment	• Customer satisfaction	• Customer retention	Marketing psychology
Naude and Buttle (2000)	Relationship quality as a multidimensional construct	• Trust • Satisfaction • Coordination • Power • Profit	• Contextual factors • Individual motivations	• Repeat purchase	Marketing

Roberts, Varki and Brodie (2003)	Relationship quality "defined as a measure of the extent to which consumers want to maintain relationships with their service providers" (2003: 191)	• Trust • Satisfaction • Commitment • Affective conflict	• Relationship disposition of customer • Positive prior interactions	• Positive behavioural intentions • Co-operation • Customer retention • Competitive advantage	Marketing
Palmatier et al. (2006)	Relationship quality as "overall assessment of the strength of a relationship, conceptualised as a composite or multidimensional construct capturing the different but related facets of a relationship" (2006: 138)	• Commitment • Trust • Relationship satisfaction	• Expertise • Communication	• Co-operation • Performance	Relationship marketing
Palmatier (2008)	Relationship quality "conceptualised as a higher-order latent construct with multiple first-order factors…[which] captures unique aspects of the relationship and, in the aggregate, indicates the overall calibre of the relational ties" (2008: 77)	• Commitment • Trust • Reciprocity norms • Exchange efficiency	Not discussed	• Increased cooperative and adaptive behaviours • Impact of other relational drivers enhanced • Increase in customer value	Relationship marketing
Nyaga and Whipple (2011)	Relationship quality as a higher order construct	• Commitment • Trust • Satisfaction • Relationship-specific investments	Not discussed	• Operational performance	Business management

Jelodar, Yiu and Wilkinson (2016)	"A high order construct made of several distinct though related dimensions or attributes which can deliver an evaluation tool for working relationship status" (2016: 998)	• Trust • Commitment • Teamwork • Performance satisfaction	• Joint problem solving • Shared culture, responsibilities, goals • Fairness	• Improved performance • Improved profit margins	Project management (construction)
Jiang et al. (2016)	Adopts Palmatier's 2008 definition, views relationship quality as a higher order construct.	• Communication intensity • Long-term orientation • Social and economic satisfaction of relationship	• Trust • Commitment	• Relationship continuity • Customer loyalty • Business performance	Marketing psychology (business to business relationships)
Zhang et al. (2016)	Relationship quality as a multi-dimensional concept	• Commitment • Trust • Dependence • Relational norms	• Relationship state (damaged, transactional, transitional, communal)	• Relationship development and profitability	Marketing
Lussier and Hall (2018)	Relationship quality as a unidimensional construct	• Customer trust, • Customer satisfaction • Customer commitment	• Co-operation • Expertise	• Sales performance • Intention to continue relationship	Business-to-business selling

Of the thirteen studies summarised in Table 4.3, eleven include trust as a dimension of relationship quality, whilst Jiang et al. (2016) view it as an antecedent. In a service relationship, trust influences customer expectations and subsequent behaviours (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987) and can relate to both the individual salesperson and the sales firm (Doney and Cannon 1997). Trust is a major determinant of relationship commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994), promotes affective commitment and reduces transaction costs in a developing relationship, and can act as a stabilising function of a customer relationship (Hennig-Thurau and Klee 1997).

Commitment is seen an indicator of relationship quality in eight of the studies reviewed, with one citing it as an antecedent, and another as an outcome. Commitment is defined as an enduring wish to maintain a valued relationship, and this can act as a relational mediator (Palmatier et al. 2006). Relationships are conceived as bonds, entered into voluntarily but with varying degrees of binding commitment (Roberts, Varki and Brodie 2003), and these bonds which tie a customer to a service can be contextual or perceived, intrinsic or extrinsic. However, commitment is not always an indicator of relationship strength, as other external factors and dependencies could influence the degree of commitment on the part of each party (Storbacka, Strandvik and Gronroos 1994).

According to Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987), commitment entails shared values, joint investment in the relationship and an acceptance of mutual dependence. Interdependence occurs in a relationship in which mutual benefit is perceived on both sides, and in which “any loss of autonomy will be equitably compensated through the expected gains” (Mohr and Spekman 1994: 138). Thus the level of investment committed in the relationship by each party is seen as a determinant of relationship quality, and an indicator of whether the relationship is based on co-operation or resistance (Gellert and Schalk 2012).

Whilst a significant proportion of the literature considers trust and commitment to be key indicators of relationship quality, an alternative view is described by Jiang et al. (2016) which sees them as mediating variables and antecedents, rather than as measures in themselves. Rather, aspects of the relationship experience are highlighted as more reliable indicators, including communication intensity, long-term orientation, and social and economic satisfaction with the relationship. This approach prioritises actual practice

and relationship-specific evaluations which may be more readily operationalised than broader constructs.

Satisfaction as a dimension of relationship quality is emphasised by eight studies, with a further two identifying it as an antecedent (Storbacka, Strandvik and Gronroos 1994; Tohidinia and Haghighi 2011). Satisfaction is defined as an emotional state resulting from the customer's evaluation of the service performance and interactions (Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990; Palmatier et al. 2006). However, what is meant by satisfaction varies across the studies reviewed: for some it refers to satisfaction with the relationship itself, for some it refers to satisfaction with service performance and exchange efficiency, and for others it means customer satisfaction in a general sense. Satisfaction with relationship quality functions differently to service quality, and as such can be a better indicator of the behavioural intentions of customers, particularly when interactions are ongoing rather than transactional and involve business to business exchange instead of consumer markets (Roberts, Varki and Brodie 2003).

In addition to the dimensions of trust, commitment and satisfaction, the theme of reciprocity, mutuality and shared values also emerges from the literature, recognising that relationships are two-sided and influenced by the actions and behaviours of each party, as experienced through communication and information sharing, joint problem-solving and cooperative behaviours (Mohr and Spekman 1994). Mutual understanding fosters strong collaborative workplace relationships and allows reciprocal behaviours to be targeted more effectively (Benlian and Haffke 2016; Stea, Pedersen and Foss 2017). Successful relationships are those which demonstrate these positive traits with more intensity.

The review of relationship quality literature highlights different conceptualisations of the construct, with some studies focusing on the specifics of relationship exchange experiences while others take a wider view of relationship development. In these cases, more emphasis is given to recognising relationship quality as a dynamic process in which relationships build up through multiple exchange encounters (Palmatier et al. 2013). As relationship norms develop and become aligned over time and experience, the relationship progresses through stages of maturity towards the ultimate goal for marketeers of customer relationship profitability (Storbacka, Strabdvik and Gronroos 1994). An alternative to this graduated model is proposed which explores the

significance of transformational relationship events which can drive the dynamics of relationship development by disrupting relational expectations either positively or negatively, and lead to the reshaping of the relationship (Harmeling et al. 2015).

If relationship development is accepted as a dynamic process, then it follows that relational drivers will vary in their effectiveness depending on the stage of the relationship. This has been particularly noted in relationship marketing literature which has examined relationship quality at different stages and levels in an effort to identify appropriate relationship marketing strategies (e.g. Zhang et al. 2016). Whilst this more developed conceptualisation recognises the complexities and realities of relationships, it makes the operationalisation of the construct significantly more challenging.

4.3.3 Theoretical underpinnings of relationship quality research

The most prominent theoretical perspectives drawn on in the relationship quality literature reviewed were leader-member exchange, social exchange theory and resource based theory. Where research is focused on relationships between work teams or colleagues or within an organisation, leader-member exchange is used as the theoretical basis for the conceptualisation of relationship quality and to operationalise the multidimensional construct (Gellert and Schalk 2012; Omilion-Hodges and Baker 2013).

Social exchange theory is used as an underpinning theory for services sales and marketing studies (for example, Mullins et al. 2014), whilst Palmatier (2008) integrates exchange theory with social network theory, considering both the quality of ties as well as the number of contacts and their decision-making authority, and the interactions of relational drivers. In this instance, the network perspective broadens the focus of the study beyond dyadic exchanges and stresses the relevance of the wider network in forming the context of a dyadic relationship and its dynamics.

In studies which focus on performance and competitive advantage as an outcome of relationship quality, resource based theory provides a relevant perspective. The intangible nature of relationships and relationship quality makes them resources which are harder to access or replicate, and therefore they are a source of value and competitive advantage (Roberts, Varki and Brodie 2003; Palmatier 2008; Nyaga and Whipple 2011).

4.3.4 Antecedents of relationship quality

Whilst there is some convergence of opinion on the constituent dimensions of relationship quality, there is a more limited consensus in relation to antecedents, with a wide variety of factors taken into account and varying according to the focus of the research. The identification of antecedents is influenced by the conceptualisation and dimensions used in relationship quality research. Antecedents identified can be characteristics of either or both parties, as well as being conditions of the dyadic relationship such as duration of relationship and frequency and intensity of interaction (Palmatier et al. 2006; Khazanchi et al. 2018).

In a buyer-seller exchange relationship, for example, expertise and competence of the seller is a key factor and precursor to the development of a trusting relationship, although it is not sufficient on its own (Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990). Customer satisfaction in the seller's performance is the basis for a strong ongoing relationship, highlighting the importance of expectations of both parties. Expectations are crucial in establishing a benchmark against which interactions are measured by each party, and the assessment will either confirm or disconfirm their validity (Harmeling et al. 2015; Hennig-Thurau and Klee 1997). Expectations also relate to prior experience and the wider context, which will influence an individual's openness to a developing relationship.

Communication is cited in most studies of relationship quality as essential to organisational functioning and collaboration, and as the means through which a relationship develops (Mohr and Spekman 1994). The intensity of contact and quality of information-sharing significantly influences the development of relational norms, which in turn affects reciprocity and expectations of mutual benefit (Mullins et al. 2014). The development of rapport and a sense of personal connection allows mutual understanding to develop, which in turn promotes collaboration (Kaski, Niemi and Pullins 2018). Harmeling et al. (2015) also point to relational norms as shaped by experiences of shared culture, outlook and goals as well as similarity between the two parties as key factors influencing relationship quality.

4.3.5 Outcomes of relationship quality

The most frequently identified outcomes of relationship quality are commitment, co-operation and performance. Commitment and co-operation are viewed as immediate outcomes in terms of attitudinal and behavioural phenomena (Roberts, Varki and Brodie

2003), whilst performance is described both as a direct or indirect outcome which can come about as a result of commitment and co-operative behaviours (Palmatier 2008).

Commitment as a concept is variously operationalised as loyalty, as customer retention and longevity, as the existence of an enduring relationship or seen in the occurrence of repeat purchases as an indicator of a strong relationship (Naude and Buttle 2000). Hennig-Thurau and Klee (1997) see customer retention as an outcome of relationship quality, and recognise that commitment to a relationship has affective and cognitive dimensions involving both an emotional bond and a calculation of the cost-benefit of investing in the relationship. The pace and direction of commitment development as captured in the phrase 'relationship velocity' can significantly influence relationship performance and moves away from an understanding of commitment as a static phenomenon (Palmatier et al. 2013). In their study of the dynamic nature of relationships, Palmatier et al. (2013) show that the age and stage of the relationship have a bearing on how commitment develops, with communication and trust as key antecedents.

Co-operation was identified in three of the studies reviewed as an outcome of positive relationship (e.g. Roberts, Varki and Brodie 2003), and as an outcome benefitting both parties (Palmatier et al. 2006). Relationship quality enhances co-operative and adaptive behaviours between the parties, and if the link is a high quality one then other positive behaviours are triggered along with a willingness to accept risk in the relationship in order to gain greater benefits (Palmatier 2008). Co-operation as an outcome of relationship quality is illustrated in a study on information sharing by Sias (2005) which shows that higher quality workplace relationships lead to a greater degree of information sharing, both in terms of the volume and quality of information communicated. Collaboration between colleagues has also been demonstrated to be enhanced by high quality relationships based on mutual understanding and shared interests (Benlian and Haffke 2016), leading to positive outcomes for both individual employees and the organisation (Colbert, Bono and Purvanova 2016).

Studies which posit performance as an outcome of relationship quality articulate this either as service effectiveness or as a financial measure such as customer value, profit or financial performance (Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990; Palmatier et al. 2006). Clarifying the link, Crosby, Evans and Cowles (1990) state that relationship quality does

not directly increase sales in itself, but it supplies the conditions for more sales opportunities, which lead to increased financial performance. Likewise, Storbacka, Strandvik and Gronroos (1994) critique approaches to measuring performance in marketing literature which view customer intentions as an indicator of marketing effectiveness, noting that profitable relationships are delivered through customer actions and actual purchases, not as a result of customer intentions. A study on the link between project performance and customer satisfaction shows that relationship quality mediates project performance, and vice versa (Williams et al. 2015).

4.3.6 Relationship quality in service relationships

In relationship marketing literature, a distinction is made between services and product selling, in that transactional exchanges are seen as impersonal, discrete and episodic whereas the more relational nature of services selling leads to closer, longer-term and more interdependent associations (Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990). Likewise, levels of dependence and interdependence will have a greater effect on a service relationship than one based on the provision of goods (Scheer, Miao and Palmatier 2014), and high quality relationships can help mitigate risk in the exchange relationship (Durach and Machuca 2018). Due to the intangible nature of services, the value of those delivering them is increased as the quality of the service is bound up in the quality of the individual's expertise, capability and other characteristics (Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990). Relationship quality is therefore a more significant dimension in service contexts than in more transactional, product-focused exchanges.

This idea is supported by Palmatier et al. (2006), who propose that interpersonal relationships are more influential when exchanges are highly relational rather than purely transactional because of the significance of the interaction between individuals. Whilst the dimensions of relationship quality can be interpreted as characteristics of individuals or of the organisations that they represent, relationship quality is more influential when the relationship is between individuals, particularly when the exchange relates to a service offering. From the service provider's point of view, there is a recognition that service workers can develop strong relationships to help them to navigate the ambiguities of their boundary-spanning roles, but that fostering relationship quality takes significant investment of personal resources on their part (Prior 2016). Relationships at work also shape an individual employee's levels of personal engagement with the

objectives of the organisation, affecting the extent to which they personally invest in the outcomes of their work (Kahn and Heaphy 2014).

Given the focus of this thesis on service provision between colleagues in a university setting, relationship quality theory is highly relevant and lends a useful perspective to the understanding of the interpersonal dynamics of support staff working relationships. The connection between relationship quality and co-operative behaviours is particularly pertinent to this study given the importance of collaborative working practices in HE institutions. Although university staff may not see themselves as operating within a buyer-seller exchange context when they are supporting their colleagues, the concepts which constitute the dimensions of exchange relationship quality (trust, commitment, satisfaction and reciprocity) are themes which resonate with the literature on university support staff experiences.

4.4 Social exchange theory

As noted in Sections 4.2.7 and 4.3.3, social exchange theory underpins much of the trust and relationship quality literature outlined above, and informs management, marketing and service literature also. Whilst this thesis takes note of wider organisational and structural conditions, the primary focus is interpersonal relationships in a workplace setting, and therefore social exchange theory supports an understanding of these exchange relationships which are social in nature but driven by economic and political factors (Cook and Emerson 1978; Granovetter 1985). The concept of exchange is significant in an internal service setting, as interactions cannot be viewed as purely social as they incorporate aspects of buyer-seller exchange and the politics of power (Lawler and Yoon 1993; Dunbar 2015). Social exchange theory enables social interactions to be viewed alongside these relational drivers (e.g. Lawler and Yoon 1996), and is therefore an appropriate theoretical basis for this study. This section sets out the aspects of social exchange theory which are particularly relevant, and which will be used to provide the foundations for the conceptual framework described in Chapter 5.

Social exchange theory describes actions by individuals which are contingent on the rewarding reactions of others, and views social exchange as a means of responding to uncertainty or risk in a relationship where each party must trust the other to fulfil their obligations (Blau 1964). As a mutually contingent, mutually rewarding process, the concepts of reward and value are central to social exchange (Emerson 1976). Social

exchange behaviours sustained over time through rewards and reinforcement by other people underscore the longitudinal nature of relations which become stronger and potentially more productive over time. Social exchange theory recognises the interplay between rational and non-rational elements of human behaviour, and includes both cognitive and affective dimensions of social relations (Granovetter 1985; Molm, Whitham and Melamed 2012). Lawler (2001) emphasises the central role of emotions in exchange relationships in influencing behaviours and attitudes, as actors respond to past experiences and anticipate future rewards.

In the early literature (e.g. Blau 1964; Emerson 1976), the exchange was viewed through the dyadic relationship, but as the theory developed social exchange was increasingly seen as taking place within a network of dependent relationships (Cook and Emerson 1978), and influenced by the context and social relations in which it was situated (Granovetter 1985). Distinctions have been made between the structural and interpersonal elements of the social exchange process such as in Molm (2010) and Dunbar (2015), and these have been explored through consideration of the different exchange structures which govern these interactions.

Direct exchange can be either negotiated or reciprocal (Lawler 2001). Negotiated exchange is common in business contexts where parties explicitly agree the terms of the exchange in advance. Reciprocal exchange is common between friends and family, where individuals provide benefits for others without expectation of a direct or immediate return, instead seeing it as an investment in the relationship over time (Molm, Whitham and Melamed 2012). These two forms of exchange can also be combined in more complex, long-term relationships, such as those between colleagues. Indirect, or generalised exchange, involves an actor providing unilateral benefit to another within a network, in the expectation that they will receive benefits in return from another member of the network (Lawler 2001). The different exchange structures are significant in understanding exchange relationships, as they shape the expectations and behaviours of individuals involved, and can influence the emergence of trust and commitment.

4.4.1 Trust, risk and commitment

Trust can be seen as a means of social control within a network to manage risk and non-reciprocation, and to constrain opportunistic behaviour (Cook 2005). As outlined in the definitions of trust in Section 4.2.1 above, risk is a key factor in its development and is a

necessary condition for proving one's own trustworthiness and for judging another's (Molm 2010). Kollock (1994) describes how the existence and degrees of uncertainty, ambiguity and risk in a situation or relationship can determine the social exchange structures which underpin interactions, and lead to a reliance on trust and trustworthy behaviours. Kollock (1994) also indicates the predictive power of a reputation for trustworthiness in helping to reduce uncertainty, as exchange partners assume that past behaviour is an indicator of future intentions.

Commitment in the exchange relationship is key to the ongoing exchange and an outcome of trust, but is theorised differently by scholars. For example, Molm, Takahashi and Peterson (2000) make a clear distinction between behavioural and affective commitment but see them both as significant, whilst Kollock (1994) treats commitment as a behavioural phenomenon and Lawler (2001) views it in affective terms. Molm, Takahashi and Peterson (2000) show that reciprocal exchange produces stronger trust and affective commitment than negotiated exchange, because of the lack of assurance and greater risk involved. In the absence of assurance of future behaviours, trustworthy behaviours are construed as personal traits and intentions rather than as contractual obligations. Thus, relationships which are based on reciprocal exchange with an expectation of continuation are particularly conducive to developing trust.

The concept of 'relational cohesion' as a positive force and an outcome of repeated or frequent exchanges is illustrated by Lawler and Yoon (1993, 1996), who show that once cohesion has been achieved, the relationship is valued in itself and provides a source of constraint. Lawler and Yoon's (1996) theory of relational cohesion demonstrates how emotional and cognitive processes are intertwined in social exchange, and how commitment can develop from the emotional uplift and satisfaction which comes from working and co-operating successfully together.

4.4.2 Social exchange in the workplace

Social exchange theory makes a distinction between economic exchange and social exchange, contending that the emergence of commitment as a social phenomenon is not explained by market structures (Cook and Emerson 1978). Social exchange cannot be explained by economic approaches based on rationality, and ongoing social ties shape actors' expectations and opportunities in ways which differ from the economic logic of market behaviour (Emerson 1976). Economic theories are therefore limited in

understanding social phenomena, such as trust in exchange relations (Granovetter 1985). The theory of social embeddedness which situates economic exchange within social structures and contexts is an attempt to unite rational and non-rational behaviour and acknowledge social influences of behaviours (Granovetter 1985; Uzzi 1996). Uzzi (1996) also recognises that social relations can either facilitate or destabilise an exchange and can have both positive and negative effects.

When economic exchange is embedded in a social relation, then trust, co-operation and commitment are stronger (Molm, Melamed and Whitham 2013). For example, in the workplace, co-operation can be fostered in the transfer or exchange of social resources, such as goodwill, advice and friendship (Lazega and Patterson 1999). However, social exchange cannot ignore structural elements of power and justice, which are the backdrop to exchange interactions in networks such as in the workplace. An actor's position in a network will determine the extent of their power and influence (Cook and Emerson 1978; Emerson 1976). As a function of dependence, power affects communication and behaviour in interpersonal relationships, which in turn can affect co-operation and commitment of both parties (Dunbar 2015; Molm, Peterson and Takahashi 1999). For example, Sozen (2012) describes how secretaries can use their positions - despite their low status - to control information flows and create dependencies which gives them increased power in their networks.

An important structural element in workplace relationships is whether an exchange relationship is a matter of choice. This is significant for the present study given that often the use of internal services within an organisation is mandatory with limited or no choice of alternative providers. In a comparative study of structurally induced and structurally enabled exchange relationships, Lawler, Thye and Yoon (2006) show that perceptions of choice and control over an exchange relationship can influence an individual's affective commitment in social exchange. Specifically, when an exchange relation was forced rather than chosen, levels of cohesion, commitment and positive affect were lower. This finding has important implications for this study of workplace relations in an internal service setting.

Chapter summary

The review of literature highlights the significance of the broader Higher Education context in shaping university staff relationships and organisational dynamics. It also

emphasises the importance of co-operation and collaboration between staff as a means to respond to the challenges faced in the sector, as well as recognising the difficulties to be overcome in developing effective and positive interpersonal relationships. The trust and relationship quality literature provide a deeper understanding of the interpersonal dimensions of work relationships and inform the operationalisation of the present study of professional services staff relationships. Underpinning conceptualisations of both trust and relationship quality, social exchange theory adds further depth to the understanding of service exchange interactions, particularly in relation to reciprocity and the structure of exchange relationships.

Further research in this field is required as it is recognised that "a co-operative community based on trust and respect for each other's roles is needed. How to achieve this respectful co-operative space is yet to be resolved" (Szekeres 2011: 689). The complexity of the university environment combined with the need for effective collaboration implies a need for strong interpersonal relationships across the university staffing for institutional strategies to be achieved. Given the investment that the higher education sector makes in support staff, and the importance of effective working relationships across institutions to adapt to organisational challenges, a better understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of co-operative relationships, as well as the dynamic space in between, would help institutions to capitalise on the strengths and qualities of all their staff.

This chapter concludes Part One of this thesis which presents the review of literature pertinent to a study of workplace relationships of university professional services staff. Part Two presents the empirical research process and the research questions it addresses, and explains the philosophical and methodological stances taken in operationalising this study.

PART TWO: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Part Two of this thesis presents the empirical research elements of this study. A conceptual framework based on the literature reviewed in Part One informed the development of the empirical study, and this is described in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 elucidates the research philosophy which underpins this study, as well as the methodological approaches taken to enable transparency of the research process. Chapter 7 then concludes this part by explaining the processes and techniques employed in the data collection and data analysis stages of this study. By describing in detail the approaches and methods used, this part establishes the basis for the findings presented in the final part.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter establishes the basis for this current research by presenting the conceptual framework which guided the operationalisation of the empirical study. This framework was developed based on existing theoretical understandings contained in the literature reviewed in Part One of this thesis, and on the research questions that emerged. This chapter commences with a summary of the findings from the literature review pertinent to this study and an outline of the research questions which generated the framework structure. The conceptual framework is then presented and described in full.

5.1 Summary of findings from literature review and relevance for this study

A review of extant literature in the fields of Higher Education, service and service quality, and workplace relationships has informed the focus of this study and the resulting research questions. In bringing together these three perspectives, this current research draws on theoretical knowledge in the literature and considers contextual factors alongside relationship-specific contributions.

The Higher Education sector literature describes and examines the backdrop of the workplace relationships which are the focus of this study. Reflecting on the experience and implications of complexity and diversity in Higher Education institutions, as well as the manifestations of power, control and managerialism which characterise daily life on campus, the literature sets the scene for the performance of workplace relationships between colleagues. Studies highlight tensions between staff groups that emerge as a result of the challenges in the HE landscape (Dobson and Conway 2003; Deem and Brehony 2005) whilst others consider wider structural and organisational factors at play (Sporn 1996; Shattock 2013; Allen-Collinson 2009). The effective use of organisational resources is a common concern for all organisations, but the specific characteristics of the HE context which combines high levels of interdependence and expectations of reciprocity and goodwill with a significant degree of staff autonomy and discretion is a sectoral issue. This tension produces particular challenges for co-operation and collaboration between colleagues and informs the framing of this present study.

Studies have demonstrated the changing roles, responsibilities and professional identities of university support staff and how they relate to students and academic staff

(Whitchurch and Gordon 2013; Szekeres 2011; Small 2008). Research has also examined the workplace experiences of this staff group in terms of job satisfaction, recognition and work-related stress (Rosser 2004; Smerek and Peterson 2007). However, there is limited evidence of a more integrated approach to researching the contribution that support staff make through the provision of internal services to their colleagues, and the outcomes of such service interactions and relationships. Support staff provide the enabling infrastructure in HEIs but are virtually invisible in the literature and therefore risk not being recognised as a key resource in tackling the challenges faced by the sector.

The service perspective provides a theoretical framework for the understanding of relationships within a service setting, and the literature reviewed establishes a clear service logic and approaches to evaluating and promoting service quality. The concept of value co-creation is particularly relevant in the context of ongoing relational service exchange as is found in university professional services. However, there has been limited focus in the literature on value co-creation in an internal service setting given that the nature of interdependencies in such circumstances makes this concept particularly significant in the development of collaborative relationships. The notion of 'negative interdependence' (Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2006) in which service customers have no choice but to use a service that does not meet their needs is especially relevant for an internal service setting where organisational structures and policies restrict service use decisions on the part of the internal customer. Research into internal service provision is more limited than for external services, and there has been little attention to how interpersonal relationships influence perceptions of internal service quality.

The service perspective literature has more recently explicitly acknowledged the influence of the service context on the service exchange relationship such that a more holistic view is possible, incorporating organisational and social structures as part of a 'service eco-system' (Vargo and Lusch 2017; Akaka, Vargo and Lusch 2013). This approach has enabled researchers to take into account the situational factors involved in service exchange as well as the dynamics of the interpersonal relationship between the customer and provider. However, in the HE context, service literature is dominated by research on the student as the ultimate customer, with the internal support infrastructure and services which facilitate this external service quality lacking attention. A key finding from the service literature is the establishment of a link between internal

service quality and external service quality, such that if internal customers receive high quality service then they are better able to satisfy the needs of external customers in turn (Gremler, Bitner and Evans 1995; Reynoso and Moores 1995; Zheng et al. 2018). The literature therefore supports the basis for the current study and the potential for internal services to contribute to the wider student experience.

Service research has predominantly relied on the customer perspective in measuring service and relationship quality, and stressed the importance of customer expectations. Expectations are viewed as a benchmark against which customers assess and make judgements about the service experience, and can derive from contextual factors as well as personal values, attitudes and experience (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1994; Reynoso and Moores 1995). Expectations are also a key dimension in the development of trust in relationships such that whether or not expectations are met can significantly influence perceptions of trustworthiness for future interactions (Kramer and Lewicki 2010; Mouzas, Henneberg and Naude 2007).

Research on workplace relationships underlines the importance of trust and relationship quality as key components in the formation of co-operative relationships, service quality and customer satisfaction. Relationship quality research has drawn on social psychology, organisation science, sociology and management disciplines, and tested the concept in the more applied disciplines of marketing, HR management and organisation development (e.g. Palmatier et al. 2013; Carmeli and Gitell 2009). The result is a pragmatic approach which recognises the multidimensional nature of the concept and the influence of interpersonal, organisational and structural factors (Melamed and Simpson 2016; Storbacka, Strandvik, and Grönroos 1994). Relationship quality literature is underpinned by theoretical perspectives of trust, reciprocity and social exchange, and combines the individual and the social to capture the dynamics of exchange relationships.

Relationship quality is a significant factor in service contexts and is particularly relevant to this current study of internal service relationships due to their ongoing, recurring, long-term nature and the high levels of interdependency involved. The most frequently identified dimensions of exchange relationship quality (trust, commitment, satisfaction and reciprocity) resonate strongly with the service literature and the research into workplace relationships in HE and are therefore highly relevant to this study. The

outcomes of relationship quality most frequently identified are commitment, co-operation and performance, and these factors also relate closely to the service literature in terms of customer loyalty, resource integration for value co-creation and service quality. A relationship quality perspective therefore aids understanding of the interpersonal dynamics of internal service provision within an exchange relationship.

5.2 Research questions

This study of work relationships of university professional services staff was informed by the literature review summarised above. This thesis addresses gaps in knowledge relating to internal service exchange in a university setting, the role of relationship quality in customer perceptions of internal service quality, and the implications of relationship quality for value co-creation in an internal service context. In particular, this study provides evidence of the link between internal and external service quality in a university setting through the combined approaches of service quality and social exchange, and demonstrates the contribution of professional services staff to service outcomes. The implications of relationship quality for internal service quality are examined on an individual and organisational level.

The literature review findings emphasised the significance of situational and organisational context and of social, organisational and exchange structures as the backdrop to workplace relations between colleagues. As well as these wider factors, the behaviour of individuals involved in a service exchange will be informed by their personal beliefs, attitudes and values as well as their status and position within the organisation. The first research question, therefore, explored these background factors:

> *RQ1: What interpersonal and organisational factors influence the customer's expectations, experience and outcomes of university professional service use?*

Once the factors external to the service exchange were examined and understood, the research went on to consider whether and how the interpersonal relationship between the service provider and customer influences the customer's perceptions of service quality. The research analysed differences between exchange experiences in which the relationship was a strong influence and those in which the influence of the relationship was weaker, and whether the influence was uni- or bi-directional. The link between relationship quality and service perceptions was explored through the three stages of the

exchange relationship – expectations, experience and outcome. The research question focusing on relationship quality was therefore:

> *RQ2: What is the association between the interpersonal relationship and the customer's perceptions of service quality?*

The two questions above examined service use experience and the role of the interpersonal relationship between provider and customer in perceptions of service quality. The third focal area of this study extended the thinking beyond the individual exchange relationship to look at the longer-term consequences of relationship quality in internal service provision. The third research question aimed to uncover the outcomes of relationship quality in relation to the customer's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and the implications at individual and organisational level of high or low relationship quality. This question sought to understand what difference the quality of relationships can make to the customer's outlook and subsequent actions, and to capture the outcomes of both positive and negative relationships. The question relating to the consequences of relationship quality was therefore:

> *RQ3: How does relationship quality affect the customer's attitudes, behaviours and actions?*

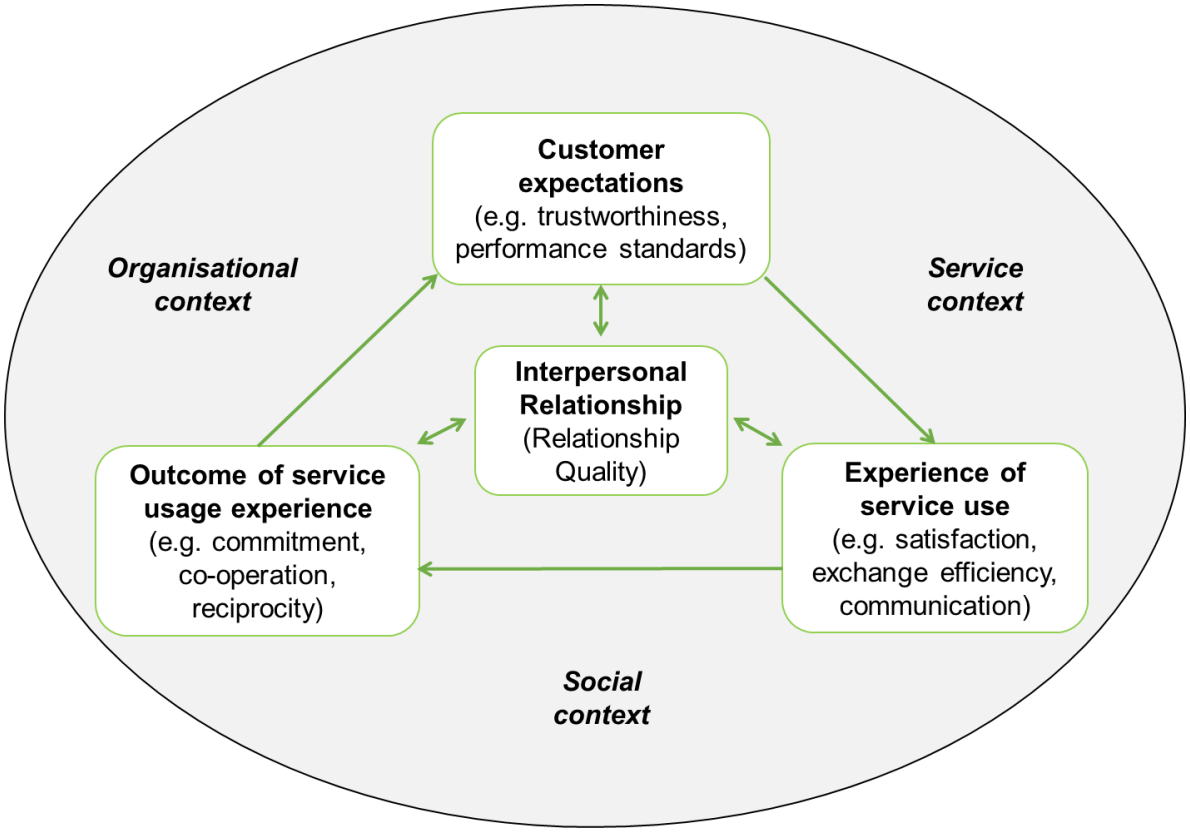
The three research questions above steered the empirical study and ensured that the research addressed the gaps identified in the literature. The next section in this chapter presents the conceptual framework which was developed in response to the literature in Part 1, and which guided the development of the practical research based on these research questions.

5.3 Introducing the conceptual framework

In social exchange theory, the social relation can be taken as the unit of analysis (Emerson 1976), and this study followed this approach. Rather than examining a dyad or the individual actors involved, this thesis sought to understand the experience of the relationship itself and how it influences perceptions of service quality on the part of the customer.

The framework set out in Figure 5.1 shows a dynamic model of the internal exchange relationship from the customer perspective. It captures three key points within the exchange, in pinpointing customer expectations, customer experience and customer outcomes, and demonstrates the link between the interpersonal relationship and the exchange relationship. The model shows how interpersonal relationship quality can influence service usage and outcomes at each stage, as well as having the potential to be influenced by these interactions. In presenting the relationships using an inner core and an outer triangle, it also allows service exchange to be understood independently from the interpersonal relationship, to accommodate situations in which the relationship has no bearing on an exchange. The model captures the recurring and cyclical nature of these relationships, as well as the potential for influences to be multi-directional.

Figure 5.1: Conceptual model of the internal service exchange relationship



(Source: Author)

The conceptual framework was developed in line with theoretical contributions emerging from the literature review summarised above. For example, in the service quality and

relationship quality literature, customer perceptions play a leading role in determining quality judgements (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985), and the model presented is consistent with this view as it prioritises the customer perspective. In social exchange theory, attention is given to interdependencies and mutual contingencies (Emerson 1976), and this model strongly reflects these elements. Similarly, the longitudinal nature of social exchange is recognised in the ongoing exchange relationship in a workplace setting, which has the potential to develop social ties for increased trust, co-operation and commitment. The framework also reflects theoretical approaches in trust, relationship quality and social exchange theory which structures analysis of relationships around the process of relationship development, from antecedents, the relationship itself, and then the consequences for individuals and the relationship (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995; Palmatier et al. 2013; Molm 2010).

The conceptual framework is situated within the wider context of these organisational and interpersonal relationships and explicitly acknowledges the influence of contextual factors which may have a bearing on how these exchange relationships play out in the workplace. This approach echoes the embedded view of social exchange (e.g. Granovetter 1985), which contends that economic and social exchange should be understood in combination as they both draw on rational and non-rational behaviour, and that economic exchange is influenced by the social context in which it occurs. In an internal service setting, the purpose of the exchange is driven by business needs, but it is conducted through social exchange and therefore the embedded view is appropriate. In addition, the model incorporates organisational, service and social elements in the context of internal service relationships to allow the influence of these underlying structures to be recognised in the dynamics of the internal exchange relationship, as identified for example by Schneider and Bowen (2019). The link between power and dependence may be especially relevant in an internal service setting where staff experience high degrees of dependence on the performance and behaviours of their colleagues.

5.3.1 Customer expectations

Expectations of internal services are developed in relation to both service quality and relationship quality, and this framework allows for both drivers to be examined. The priority given to this element is supported by the literature examined in the fields of service quality, relationship quality, trust and social exchange. In social exchange,

expectations that social obligations will be fulfilled drive the willingness of individuals to engage in exchange where an outcome is not certain (Emerson 1976), and the norm of reciprocity is founded on such an expectation (Molm 2010).

Customer expectations of service standards are a vital element in the measurement of service quality. The gap between expected service quality and the experience of service performance is a key determinant of customer satisfaction (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985). In relationship quality research, expectations are conceptualised as a benchmark against which each party measures interactions to confirm or disconfirm their validity (e.g. Hennig-Thurau and Klee 1997). Where there is uncertainty or ambiguity in service performance, expectations will inform subsequent customer behaviours and assurance needs (Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990). In exploring the implications of positive exchange relations, the existence of shared expectations of service standards and relational norms emerge as a feature of trusting relationships (Zhang et al. 2016).

In interpersonal trust literature, definitions of trust and trustworthiness hinge on expectations of the behaviours, motivations and intentions of others (e.g. Lewicki, MacAllister and Bies 1998). Kramer's (1999) examination of the different bases of trust demonstrates the variety of sources of expectations, including prior experience, reputation, stereotypes and professional identity. Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) position perceptions of trustworthiness in judgements about the ability, benevolence and integrity of the other party, indicating that the development of expectations relates to both technical, professional and personal characteristics. In conceptualising expectations within the context of both the interpersonal relationship and in the wider environment, this framework enables the various sources of customer expectations to be appreciated, whether these stem from personal characteristics, relationship experiences or wider structural, service and social factors.

5.3.2 The customer's service experience

Internal service relationships are characterised by interdependence and mutually contingent relationships, with customers relying on the services provided to achieve their objectives, and providers relying on customers as their reason for existence (Hogreve et al. 2016). In social exchange theory, the identification of structurally-induced and structurally-enabled relationships speak directly to these interdependent linkages (Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2006). These close and ongoing service exchange relationships have the potential to develop into strong networks for reciprocal exchange and co-operation if the conditions are right. In the service literature, these interdependencies are captured in the concept of value co-creation, in which the resources of customers and providers are integrated such that each derives greater value from the exchange (Vargo and Lusch 2016). Activities such as joint problem-solving and co-ordination of efforts are examples of value co-creation which draw on social structures and processes within the service eco-system. In a complex, diverse and interdependent environment such as a university, the scope for value co-creation through internal service exchange is significant.

In the conceptual framework presented above in Figure 5.1, the service experience element captures these relationship dynamics through consideration of customer satisfaction, exchange efficiency and communication experiences. Satisfaction is a key dimension in both service quality and relationship quality literature, and in a service setting it derives from an assessment by the customer of the service performance and interactions involved, including cognitive and affective judgements (Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990). In relationship quality theory, exchange efficiency can be used as an indicator of relationship quality as it involves an assessment of the costs and benefits of maintaining a relationship and a judgement about whether the effort of investment is balanced against the gains received (Palmatier 2008). Likewise, the quality and frequency of communications between exchange partners can affect the exchange experience, and the exhibition of trusting behaviours can be interpreted as indicating competence and benevolence as well as underlying values and compliance with relational norms.

5.3.3 Outcomes of service use experience

In contrast to the experience element outlined above which involves a direct assessment of the exchange experience as it occurs, the outcomes element in this model captures

the longer-term effects of service use that reflect the customer's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, and which are the product of repeated service encounters over a sustained period of time. These personal attributes in turn shape the customer's expectations and subsequent experiences in the light of those expectations, and are the third core element of this dynamic model. In particular, the emergence of attitudes and behaviours which are conducive to the development of commitment, co-operation and reciprocity (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Palmatier et al. 2013) is captured in this part of the model.

As a result of a service encounter, a customer may reflect on whether their expectations have been met or exceeded, and this can result in pre-existing conceptions being challenged. The service provider may not match their reputation or professional stereotype, and the customer may reassess their views and expectations as a result (Carlin and Love 2011; Williams 2001, 2016). Ongoing exchange relations can also allow parties to assess and recognise value congruence in the relationship, a condition which promotes trusting behaviour (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995; Sitkin and Roth 1993). Repeated encounters also allow the development of a generalised view of the reliability and competence of the service provider both for task-oriented actions and for personal integrity (De Jong, Dirks and Gillespie 2015). These cognitive and emotional processes may subsequently influence customer behaviours and whether the relationship is pursued with a collaborative or adversarial approach.

The mutuality of trust and co-operation in relationships is noted by Ferrin, Bligh and Kohles (2008) as perceptions and judgements are reciprocated through relationship dynamics. Co-operative behaviours such as information sharing and productive, two-way communications are seen as the means through which a relationship develops, with the intensity and quality of communications contributing to the development of relational norms such as reciprocity (Mullins et al. 2014). For example, Mohr and Spekman (1994) proposed information sharing as an indicator of relationship quality, as information may be withheld from an exchange partner if trust is low. Other organisational citizenship behaviours directed towards the individual can develop in the exchange relationship, such as helping to perform a task, providing constructive feedback, providing flexibility on deadlines. Such voluntary co-operative behaviours provide the foundations for trust to develop in the relationship (Ferrin, Dirks and Shah 2006).

The outcomes of the service experience may also be felt at the organisational level, in addition to the exchange level. Positive outcomes which enhance interpersonal trust may feed into the culture of an organisation and may result in more compliant, co-operative behaviours beyond the individual service exchange (MacAllister 1995; Ferrin, Dirks and Shah 2006). Negative outcomes and a lack of meaningful interpersonal interactions may lead to lower employee engagement and organisational citizenship behaviours (Kahn 1990), which may have wider consequences for organisational norms and operational effectiveness.

5.3.4 Interpersonal relationship quality in the service exchange

In the conceptual framework outlined above, the interpersonal relationship is understood through the lens of relationship quality theory, which predominantly considers exchange or workplace relationships. The interpersonal relationship is situated at the core of the model to signify its importance in effective service exchange, its relevance at all stages of the exchange relationship, and its central role in this present research. As discussed in Chapter 4 section 4.3, the most commonly identified dimensions of relationship quality cited in the literature are trust, commitment, satisfaction and reciprocity. These four dimensions are conceptualised as driving the development and ongoing maintenance of interpersonal relationships in an internal service setting.

Trust is a key component and enabler of co-operative relationships, facilitating the coordination of organisational and economic activity through productive interpersonal relationships (McKnight, Cummings and Chervany 1998; Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone 1998). Trust scholarship insights into the development and manifestation of organisational and interpersonal trust are highly relevant to this study, and underpin the conceptual framework. In particular, an appreciation of the ways in which ongoing service exchange relationships both promote trust and are themselves enhanced by its development is central to the model.

Trust and commitment are core constructs in social exchange theory and feature heavily in the literature on relationship quality and service perspectives. The two constructs contain cognitive and affective elements, and are dynamic, multi-dimensional phenomena which both influence and are influenced by relational interactions. Trust is a determinant of commitment to an exchange relationship, particularly promoting affective commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994). In relationship quality theory,

commitment is an outcome of strong relationships, and can be identified in acts of loyalty such as in customer retention, repeat purchasing and positive word-of-mouth. Commitment signifies an enduring relationship in which each party invests in the exchange relation beyond the minimum needed to maintain the link.

In social exchange theory, relational cohesion is achieved when the parties' interests and motivations are aligned such that they gain more benefit from the relationship than the effort involved in its maintenance (Lawler and Yoon 1996). According to Lawler and Yoon's (1996) theory of relational cohesion, the phenomenon is generated by the combination of emotional and cognitive processes through social exchange, and describes the unifying force of a co-operative, loyal relationship which is built up through repeated interactions and an ongoing relationship. The behavioural and emotional elements involved are illustrated in the distinction between behavioural commitment, which is demonstrated through repeat exchange, and affective commitment as experienced through positive regard and loyalty to the individual or relationship (Molm, Takahashi and Peterson 2000).

Closely linked to commitment, reciprocity is a core construct in social exchange theory and highly relevant to this dynamic model, as repeated interactions provide the opportunity for social obligations to be created and fulfilled, and for reciprocity to underpin co-operative relationships. In the context of mutually dependent relationships, acts of reciprocity reward positive behaviour and have expressive value in conveying commitment to the interpersonal relationship, promoting co-operation and increasing the affective character of the bond (Molm 2010). The structure of reciprocity is also pertinent to this study, as relationships may be imposed by organisational structures, or be entered into voluntarily. Reciprocity theory allows the effect of these structures to be recognised in the different characteristics of the resulting relationships, and the model reflects the influence of these wider structural conditions on the interpersonal relationships.

Customer satisfaction with the exchange relationship itself is considered through relationship quality. Whilst influenced by satisfaction in the service performance, the value of the exchange relationship relates specifically to the costs and benefits resulting from the efforts to maintain the relationship (Palmatier et al. 2008). It is therefore closely linked to commitment and reciprocity theory, and it involves an ongoing assessment of relationship effectiveness. The positive effects of customer loyalty for the relationship is

illustrated in the concept of a 'zone of tolerance', described as the difference between adequate and desired service quality (Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman 1996). In relationships with strong bonds, customers may have a wider zone of tolerance and be prepared to accept lower service quality as a result, because of the value placed on the relationship itself. Likewise, a customer may be dissatisfied with an individual exchange encounter, but still be satisfied with the exchange relationship overall (Storbacka, Strandvik and Gronroos 1994). This interplay between the quality of the interpersonal relationship and the perceptions of service quality on the part of the user is at the heart of the conceptual framework.

5.3.5 Context of internal service exchange relationships

As noted above, the conceptual framework grounds the internal service exchange relationship in the wider organisational, service and social context, and proposes that the relationship cannot be fully understood without reference to these wider factors which may enable or constrain the development of these relationships.

The organisational context refers to the institutional structures, policies and processes of the particular organisation, as well as to the characteristics of the wider HE sector such as regulatory and financial pressures. The organisational context includes tangible factors such as resources and physical infrastructure, for example such as may influence whether staff are co-located or conduct relationships at a distance. It also incorporates intangible aspects of the organisation such as organisational politics and culture which may equally influence the ways in which exchange relationships are conducted (Carmeli and Gitell 2009). For example, the structures and use of power, both formal and informal have been shown in social exchange theory to influence the development of interpersonal relationships (Molm, Peterson and Takahashi 1999), and the power balance in these relationships can also act as a constraint on the use of power, affecting the behaviour of individuals in the exchange (Cook and Emerson 1978).

The service context describes the conditions and nature of the service provision, such as the service design and delivery model, which may dictate the extent to which an interpersonal relationship is possible. It includes service characteristics which can influence the nature and extent of dependency and interdependency between colleagues such as access to specialist or technical expertise, and whether the use of the service is mandatory or optional. The context of the service also relates to the wider theoretical

underpinnings of service logic and the dynamics of the customer – provider relationship, which may inform the expectations, identities and behaviours of the individual actors involved (Greer, Lusch and Vargo 2016; Zhang et al. 2016). Where professional identity is linked to the quality of service provision this may also influence the service exchange relationship (Whitchurch 2006).

The social context is integral to any attempt to understand social relations in organisations (Handy 1993) and is therefore critical to this current study. Within a complex organisation such as a university in which high levels of collaboration and co-operation are the norm, the development and use of social networks and social capital are vital for effective working relationships (Melamed and Simpson 2016). Social exchange theory provides the basis for understanding the social drivers of service exchange relationships, such as how relational norms may constrain behaviour and facilitate ongoing stable, trusting relationships (Cook 2005). Economic life is embedded in social relations according to proponents of the embedded view (Granovetter 1985; Edvardsson, Tronvoll and Gruber 2011) and social relations provide the necessary conditions for trust and trustworthy behaviour which in turn influence the effectiveness of social and economic exchange (McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer 2003). By taking the social context into account, the framework allows for rational and non-rational, cognitive and affective aspects of working relationships to be recognised, as well as the influence of social drivers beyond the individual relationship in question.

Chapter summary

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 5.1 is based on a review of literature and consideration of the core constructs identified within it, using the principles of social exchange theory. The model demonstrates the interplay between service quality and relationship quality, and how these may influence each other in an internal service setting where the service exchange relationship can be a long-term link. The model also sets this relationship in the wider organisational, service and social context, acknowledging that each of these aspects may shape the interaction and the ongoing relationship between colleagues. The conceptual framework informed the subsequent methodological approaches employed for empirical study, and provided a basis for the operationalisation of the research questions presented in this chapter. Next, Chapter 6 describes these methodological decisions and rationale in greater detail, along with explanations of the philosophical and analytical approaches employed in this research.

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY, METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Recognising that research design and methodological approach derive substantially from the purpose of the research and the nature of the inquiry, this chapter begins with a rehearsal of the main aims of this study before focusing on the underpinning research philosophy and theoretical perspectives employed. The research methodology and approaches to data collection and analysis are then presented to provide a clear explanation of the research processes undertaken in this study.

The purpose of this research is to extend internal service quality theory through an exploration of the quality of interpersonal relationships that university professional services staff have with their customer colleagues, from the point of view of the service user. The central interest of the current study is the experience, attitudes and behaviours of staff resulting from their interactions with professional service colleagues. The ways in which these staff understand and interpret their encounters with professional services teams, and the outcomes from such interpretations are of primary concern. Specifically, this research looks to understand the organisational and interpersonal factors which affect service experience and outcomes, and how these influence the attitudes and behaviours of university staff. The following questions are explored:

> RQ1: What interpersonal and organisational factors influence the customer's expectations, experience and outcomes of university professional service use?
>
> RQ2: What is the association between the interpersonal relationship and the customer's perceptions of service quality?
>
> RQ3: How does relationship quality affect the customer's attitudes, behaviours and actions?

Through an examination of the implications of internal service relationships for service quality, this research complements current understandings of service delivery models and structures by providing greater emphasis on the influence of relationship quality.

6.1 Relationship between research questions and methodology

The methodology selected for any research project should be rooted in the nature of the research question, such that there is congruence between methods and knowledge sought, and internal consistency and logic in the underpinning research philosophy (Grix 2010; O'Gorman and MacIntosh 2015; Cresswell 2007; Bryman and Bell 2015). The interconnection and interrelatedness of research purpose, questions and methods can be lost when the research process is set out in the form of a process map starting with ontology and epistemology and ending with data collection and analysis, such as shown in Figure 6.1. Whilst such research process maps can give the impression of a linear, unidirectional process of decision-making on the part of the researcher as a methodology is developed, reflection and revision may also be required in order to select an appropriate approach for the research question in hand.

Figure 6.1: The interrelationship between the building blocks of research

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(Grix 2010: 68)

6.2 Research philosophy

All research methodologies are underpinned by philosophical assumptions – conscious or unconscious – about the nature of the world (ontology) and the means through which we as human beings make sense of our surroundings (epistemology) (Ruane 2005). A

researcher's search for knowledge will be informed by these assumptions about the nature of truth and about how knowledge can be perceived.

6.2.1 Ontology

Ontology is sometimes conflated with epistemology (see for example Crotty 2003), but is a distinct field of philosophy. It is often implied in published research rather than explicitly discussed. Ontological philosophy concerns assumptions about what constitutes reality, what exists in the world, and how different elements relate to each other (Grix 2010). Western thought has been divided into two opposing ontological traditions since these were articulated by ancient Greek philosophers Parmenides (*c*.515–*c*.445bc) and Heraclitus (*c*.535–*c*.475bc). Parmenides promoted the view of reality as fixed and unchanging, awaiting discovery, whilst Heraclitus espoused the view that reality is ever-changing and emergent, and forever in a state of flux (Gray 2014). The former view has been the prevailing philosophy in scientific thought with a focus on objectivity, whilst the latter view is seen to underpin more socially-oriented approaches.

The ontological position adopted in this current study follows the philosophy of Heraclitus in viewing the world as in a state of 'becoming', with no fixed objective reality, in that social reality is constantly evolving. This view feeds into an epistemological position which is discussed below.

6.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowledge, and how human beings can know about the world and establish the nature of truth. A foundationalist perspective views reality as existing independently of our ability to discover it, and includes the possibility of the discovery of universal and indisputable truths. In contrast, an anti-foundationalist view does not see the world as existing separately from human knowledge of it, but considers reality to be socially constructed and focuses on meaning and the possibility of multiple truths (Grix 2010). These epistemological perspectives are often positioned as polar opposites, setting realism against relativism, objectivism against subjectivism, and scientific approaches against social understandings. The different epistemological positions can be illustrated through an examination of the relationship between theory and empirical research, and in particular the differences between a positivist and interpretivist stance.

Positivism offers neutral, universal explanations of the world based on a realist perspective in the foundationalist tradition, in which new knowledge is discovered not created (O'Gorman and MacIntosh 2015). Positivists aim to present an objective understanding of scientific and social reality with research findings which are valid and generalisable and which can be empirically proven (Crotty 2003). Research undertaken with a positivist view attempts to be conducted in a manner that is value-free and unbiased, with the researcher taking an impartial stance to the research question. The alternative perspective grounded in the anti-foundationalist view is the interpretivist epistemology, which sees meaning and value in the world as socially constructed through interaction and individual understandings, with the possibility of different truths existing for different people in different contexts. Interpretivists see the social world as fundamentally different from the natural world, and therefore requiring a different research logic (Bryman and Bell 2015). A primarily subjectivist approach, interpretivism is concerned with developing deep understandings of social complexities which take account of individual experiences and meanings in natural settings (Cresswell 2007).

The implications of these epistemologies for the research process can be seen in the way theory development is approached. Positivism starts with an abstract theory and then tests that theory by looking for evidence which proves or disproves its hypotheses. By contrast, interpretivism starts in the empirical realm by gathering data and lets theory emerge more organically from the evidence. The former produces theory-driven research, and the latter results in evidence-driven theory (Gray 2014).

Constructivism is an epistemological position which sits between positivism and interpretivism. If positivism is concerned with objectivity, and interpretivism is characterised by subjectivity, then constructionism brings the two positions together as these concepts only gain meaning in relation to each other. Objects may exist in the world independent of human knowledge of them, but they only acquire meaning through social interaction and human consciousness of them, and this meaning is continually revised. As such, meaning is not discovered or created, but constructed (Crotty 2003).

A key concept in constructivism is 'intentionality' which refers to the interlinking of object and subject. For Crotty (2003) this essential relationship is symbiotic: "Consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. An object is always an object *for* someone" (2003: 79). Crotty outlines social constructivism as allowing both realist and relativist

perspectives, as the world exists as a reality which can be invested with meaning through a representation of reality. In this perspective, knowledge is inseparable from language in the way that we make sense of the world, with human knowledge preceded by the language we use to describe it (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

In contrast to constructivism which focuses on how individuals construct meaning with each individual interpretation being equally valid (see for example Efran et al. 2002), constructionism allows for the collective generation of meaning through social exchange and interaction between individuals and society. This perspective recognises the way that culture can be both liberating and limiting in shaping the views of individuals (Crotty 2003). Social constructionism combines understandings of how individuals construct meaning with the recognition that we inhabit pre-existing culture and communities with embedded meanings resulting from historical and social perspectives, and therefore context is important in any exploration of social phenomena (Holstein and Gubrium 2011).

On the spectrum between positivism and interpretivism, the epistemological position taken in this present study is broadly interpretivist due to its focus on the lived experiences of individuals in a social context. This research embraces a world-view which recognises the complexity, interconnectedness and 'messiness' of human experience in context, albeit one in which we continue to search for universal meanings. Whilst binary dichotomies can be helpful in distinguishing between concepts and philosophies, such narrow and polarised positions are unreflective of the reality of human experience. There is a paradox to be found in the seemingly essential need for human beings to categorise and compartmentalise phenomena in a world which is fundamentally too complex and nuanced to be effectively understood in those terms. Taking a more integrated, holistic view of the world, the epistemological stance adopted in this research is associated most closely with social constructionism.

6.3 Theoretical perspective

Theoretical perspectives inform the operationalisation of research, bridging the gap between epistemological philosophy and research strategy, providing tools and detailed descriptions of theoretical implications of epistemological positions. In mapping the research process, theoretical perspectives are located between epistemology and methodology, or can be explained as a more detailed level of epistemology. Moving

away from the epistemological extremes of positivism and interpretivism, three perspectives come into focus as possible standpoints for this present research: critical realism, phenomenology and pragmatism.

6.3.1 Critical realism

Critical realism considers the social world as knowable through a combination of observable reality and understandings of social contexts as influenced by underlying structures which are not directly observable (Bryman and Bell 2015). Critical realism straddles the positivist and interpretivist paradigms, sharing a foundationalist epistemology with positivism and a tendency for scientific methods, but allowing for interpretation of the social world (Grix 2010). Proponents (for example, Roy Bhaskar) see the world as theory-laden, but not determined by theory, and place emphasis on both physical processes and ideas and meanings.

Critical realists view reality as existing independent of our knowledge of it, but understand this as stratified layers of reality. Using an iceberg metaphor to explain critical realist ontology, Fletcher (2016) describes an empirical level at the tip which is the knowledge we can observe and understand through human interpretation, an actual level of reality which is just below the surface which exists whether or not it is observed, and a real level at the base of the iceberg which consists of objects and structures which cause events to occur at the empirical level. With such a perspective, human agency acquires meaning in relation to structures and vice versa, and theories uncover the deep underlying structures and causation of social reality. As a theoretical perspective, critical realism offers an integrated approach to understanding social interactions, but its grounding in positivism is incompatible with the constructionist epistemological position of this research, as interpretive elements seem to be grafted on to the foundational roots, rather than set at the heart of this perspective.

6.3.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology starts from an interpretivist perspective to examine and understand social reality through the experiences of individuals directly encountering the world. Human behaviour is understood as a product of an individual's interpretation and meaning-making of an event or phenomenon (Bryman and Bell 2015). As a theoretical perspective, phenomenology has the potential to offer an appropriate framework for this present research due to its focus on the individual experience of a social phenomenon.

As a tradition seen as a touchstone in social research, it calls into question pre-existing assumptions and adopts a note of objectivity in its critical methodology by taking the experience of a phenomena as its starting point (Crotty 2003). Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences, prioritising the understanding of the essence of an experience over explanations and analysis (Cresswell 2007). This is achieved through seeking textural descriptions of an experience alongside structural descriptions of the context or setting of the phenomenon.

The concept of intentionality proposed by Husserl (cited in Crotty 2003: 79) and as described in Section 6.2.2, points to phenomenology's roots in constructionism. Another key concept in phenomenological approaches is the putting aside of existing understandings in order to see the phenomena afresh, with unprejudiced eyes, in order to focus solely on how participants experience the phenomena. Termed 'epoche' or 'bracketing', by suspending understanding the researcher separates the phenomenon from the interpretation, and calls into question cultural ways of seeing by viewing the experience first-hand (Crotty 2003). This philosophical approach is supported by defined steps as to how to achieve such bracketing through data collection and analysis methods (e.g. Moustakas 1994), and researchers are encouraged to explicitly acknowledge and address their own subjectivity throughout the research process in order to set it aside (Sandberg 2005).

The phenomenological perspective has much to offer a study of staff experiences of service use and interpersonal relationships, particularly in the way that lived experiences can be critically explored from a shared perspective to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomena. However, much as the concept of bracketing appeals as a means of addressing researcher bias, it is questionable whether a researcher can truly approach a phenomena with fresh eyes and with suspended understanding, leaving all experience behind. For practitioner-researchers in particular, it may be instructive to draw on existing understandings and to acknowledge this experience through the research process, whilst also giving primacy to the interpretations of research participants.

6.3.3 Pragmatism

Based on constructionism with interpretive leanings, pragmatic philosophy is a subjective epistemology which acknowledges the importance of social, historical and political contexts, but is not committed to any one epistemological position. Instead, proponents

of this perspective promote paradigm pluralism, preferring to select methods on the basis of their potential to best meet the needs and purpose of the research, and to achieve the desired outcome to improve understanding (Cresswell 2007). Pragmatism therefore moves away from a focus on the antecedent conditions of research to prioritise research outcomes, aligning abstract ideas with practical application (Gordon 2009). In the paradigm wars of the last thirty years in academia, purists on both sides have advanced the 'incompatibility thesis' maintaining the binary divide, whilst pragmatists have responded by rejecting such dualism and adopting a more integrative 'what works' approach (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Tranfield and Starkey 1998).

Pragmatism as a critical philosophy derives from the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, and was subsequently developed by William James and John Dewey, who linked the meaning of ideas and values to outcomes and consequences in ordinary contexts. The classical pragmatist perspective was further developed by George Herbert Mead who introduced the philosophy into sociological thought and inspired the symbolic interactionism approach (Crotty 2003). The key tenets of pragmatism are that understandings of reality are created through interaction in and with the world, and that knowledge is grown through experience of what has proven useful, with social and physical objects defined according to how they are used in reality (Ritzer 2008). A revival of pragmatism as a post-positivist philosophy was led by US philosophers such as Rorty, Quine and Putnam, and was drawn on by sociologists such as Durkheim and Habermas (Baert 2005). In Baert's (2005) view, pragmatism considers knowledge as action, and contends that the dialogue required to achieve such knowledge changes understandings of the world, and hence pragmatism can be a critical social philosophy.

An integrative, interdisciplinary approach to research design which captures the strengths and mitigates the weaknesses of individual methods is the hall-mark of critical pragmatism (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005). Prioritising methodological congruence, pragmatism explicitly aims to ensure that the research questions and methodology are consistent and interrelated with the purpose of the research (Cresswell 2007), integrating philosophical concerns with human experience and bridging methodological dichotomies (Shannon-Baker 2016). Sharing common ground with phenomenology and critical theory, pragmatism can offer a holistic view of the social world which enables rich knowledge to be developed by drawing on a wide range of approaches, unified by a sense of purpose regarding outcomes.

Pragmatism receives much criticism for its natural instincts towards practical applicability and compromise, and has been accused of lacking vision, accommodating uncritical scholarship, conformism and acquiescence. These views have some foundation in the way that pragmatism was subsequently adopted and popularised, but are seen as unfair criticism of the original version which offered a more critical pragmatism (Crotty 2003). Epistemological issues are relevant to pragmatism and cannot be ignored as they underpin methodological approaches, but they are not seen as incompatible propositions nor as the overarching concern. Providing that pragmatism is not used as an excuse for lack of rigour in research philosophy, it can offer a theoretical perspective which strengthens research in applied fields due to the focus on the impact of the research undertaken.

Pragmatism is increasingly used in social science disciplines such as HR management (e.g. Korte and Mercurio 2017), and organisation and management research (e.g. Kelemen and Rumens 2012), due to its practical stance and focus on the tangible consequences of what people think and do, as well as its potential for producing applicable and transferable findings (Shannon-Baker 2016). 'Pragmatic realism' allows social scientists to connect critically with the realities of life beyond scholarship to have greater societal impact through engagement with practitioner communities (Watson 2010), whilst "slogging through various bogs" of everyday life (Korte and Mercurio 2017: 80).

Reviewing each of the three perspectives put forward above, the critical pragmatic perspective emerges as the most appropriate for this present study as a result of the fit with constructionist epistemology, its integrative and holistic approaches, and the primacy given to the research purpose as the driving force behind methodological decisions. This perspective is particularly relevant to this current study as it is aligned with the purpose of the research which focuses on the outcomes of interpersonal relationships and the practical application of the knowledge gained to improve professional support services in universities.

6.4 Research strategy and methodology

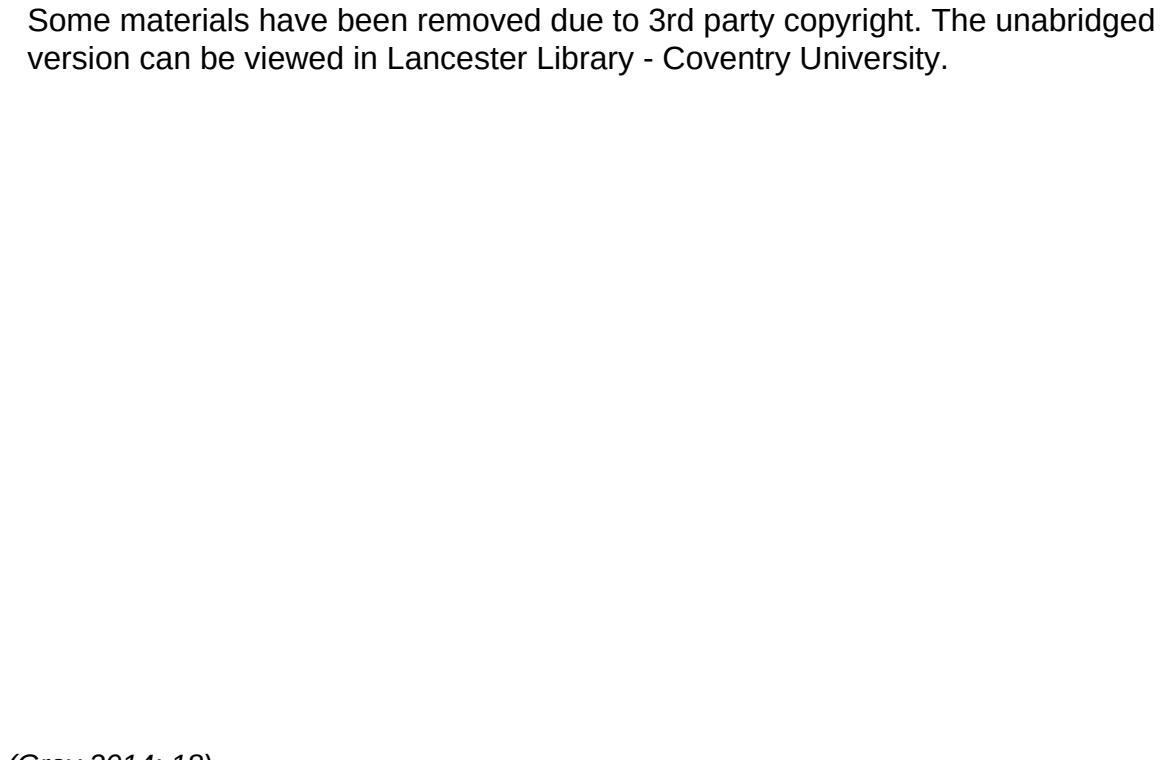
Research strategy defines the way in which research will approach the process of data gathering and analysis, and is informed by the researcher's ontological and epistemological position (Ruane 2005). Two further binary divides are explicitly addressed in the sections below in order to arrive at an appropriate approach which serves the purposes of the research question: deductive versus inductive reasoning, and quantitative versus qualitative methods (Bryman and Bell 2015).

6.4.1 Deductive and inductive reasoning

Following on from epistemology which sets out a perspective on the nature of knowledge, research will use either deduction or induction as the means to gather and analyse that knowledge, in keeping with the research philosophy adopted. Deductive logic tends to follow a positivist perspective in that it is used to test an established *a priori* theory or hypothesis through empirical observation or experimentation, whilst inductive logic tends to be in keeping with interpretivist approaches which start in empirical data and generate theory *a posteriori* as an outcome of the research through identification of patterns or meaning (Ruane 2005). Deductive and inductive reasoning drives the data analysis stage of the research project (O'Gorman and MacIntosh 2015) but will also determine the appropriate method for data collection and establishing a project at the outset.

In practice, the binary choice between the two approaches is a false dichotomy, and researchers can successfully combine aspects of each in order to address a research question, as they are not mutually exclusive (Gray 2014). Whilst researchers may have a preference for one or the other, it is unrealistic to expect that those using inductive reasoning will take no note of pre-existing theories or ideas when they approach a problem, nor that those using deductive reasoning will not use a degree of induction when sifting through information to inform their hypothesis. Figure 6.2 illustrates how the two approaches can contribute to a research methodology.

Figure 6.2: An illustration of how the inductive and deductive methods can be combined



(Gray 2014: 18)

The approach adopted in this current research was predominantly inductive, as the prime focus was on the individual perspectives and experiences of staff in universities in how they interpret their interactions with their professional services colleagues. The knowledge sought emerged from the analysis of data provided by these participants, rather than through the testing of hypotheses. The conceptual framework described in Chapter 5 was used to visually illustrate the relationships between concepts as theorised in the literature reviewed, not to direct the analytical process.

6.4.2 Quantitative and qualitative methodologies

Often presented and understood as competing paradigms, quantitative approaches are concerned with quantifying, measuring and explaining the world through causal links, whilst qualitative approaches focus on unquantifiable experiences and aim to achieve a rich understanding of the world through interpretation of that world by its participants (Bryman and Bell 2015). Methodology can be understood independently of any ontological or epistemological position, and as neutral tools to be employed according to the needs of the researcher (Ritchie and Lewis 2003; Seale et al. 2007). However,

certain approaches are more readily accessible to certain world views, and researchers tend to view research methodologies as better aligned with some perspectives than others. This underlines the importance of selecting the methodology which best suits the research question and purpose of the study.

Quantitative research methods are appropriate if the aim of the research is to demonstrate a causal link between phenomena, as the techniques used promote reliability, validity and generalisability of the research findings. Quantitative approaches tend to be adopted by positivist researchers in the testing of *a priori* theoretical hypotheses using deductive reasoning. Qualitative research methods, on the other hand, aim to understand social reality in natural settings, in context, and on the terms of the participants and therefore findings are not generalisable and cannot be independently validated in the same was as quantitative findings can be. Rather, qualitative data should be evaluated in ways which assess trustworthiness and authenticity, with credibility, transferability and dependability emerging from the rigour with which the researcher describes the findings and the research process (Bryman and Bell 2015).

The richness of qualitative data allows researchers to understand the inner reality of individuals as well as the interplay between internal and external factors, and the way that phenomena develop over time. The use of multiple methods, practices and perspectives adds rigour, breadth, depth and complexity to an inquiry but researchers must be transparent, open and reflective of their methods, processes and assumptions in order to present these findings as credible (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) characterise the qualitative researcher as a 'bricoleur' or 'quilt-maker' who adapts and makes do with available tools and materials at hand, piecing the parts together using emergent, iterative strategies tailored for the specifics of a complex situation. Table 6.1 from Bryman and Bell (2015) illustrates and summarises some of the main difference between the two paradigms.

Table 6.1: Some common contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research

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(Bryman and Bell 2015: 416)

Whilst there are notable differences in the approaches of quantitative and qualitative research strategies, there are also similarities which unite the positions, particularly in terms of research quality. For example, both are concerned with applying appropriate methods in response to a research question, both attempt to relate data analysis to the literature, and both strive to be transparent about their methods and process and to avoid distortion, error and bias in their research.

Mixed method research

Firmly rooted in the pragmatic tradition, mixed methods research shows that a wedge need not be driven between the two paradigms, but that the approaches can in certain circumstances be fruitfully combined to achieve the best of both worlds (Bryman and Bell 2015; Onwuegbuzie, Johnson and Collins 2009). Rejecting the incompatibility thesis and promoting paradigm pluralism, mixed methods research is proposed as a third methodological movement as an alternative to purely quantitative or qualitative methodologies (Onwuegbuzie and Collins 2007; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2011). Characterised by methodological eclecticism, the approach combines methods to provide depth and breadth of understanding, allowing for corroboration of findings and cancelling out the potential weaknesses in using any one method. In true pragmatic spirit, the driver is the purpose of the research and the methods selected should be the ones which best suit this purpose and achieve the desired outcomes (Onwuegbuzie and

Leech 2005). Table 6.2 presents the main characteristics found in mixed methods research.

Table 6.2: Eight contemporary characteristics of mixed methods research

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(Teddlie and Tashakkori 2011: 287)

Mixed methods research has been widely adopted in applied research fields such as education and healthcare, where a pragmatic, broad and contextualised view is needed to address practical questions and where qualitative data can be used to explore complex and evolving situations in ways that numerical data alone cannot. In some circumstances a researcher may choose to use a qualitative method initially, and then extend data with a follow-up quantitative approach, whilst in other situations a researcher might start from a quantitative study to explore the extent of a phenomenon and then follow-up with a qualitative method to delve deeper into experience and interpretations of the phenomenon in question (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2011).

Mixed methods research has been criticised for many of the same traits as pragmatism such as paradigm confusion, lack of clear definition and processes and inhabiting a 'messy' middle ground of compromise (Cresswell 2011). Subscribers to the incompatibility thesis will reject mixed methods as a viable approach on epistemological grounds, on the basis that the two paradigms are mutually exclusive. However, drawing on the pragmatist perspective, research methods are seen as independent of epistemology, and as such can be combined across the divide. In order for researchers to uphold the mixed methods approach and to not be accused of misappropriation or poor practice, care must be taken to ground the methodology in the research question, to tailor an appropriate approach which directly addresses the issues of the inquiry, and

to be clear about how each method employed contributes to understanding of the problem (Grix 2010).

The use of mixed methods in trust research is increasing as a means to understanding human behaviour and experience in context (e.g. Kramer 2015; Saunders 2015 and Muethel 2015). It is also becoming more acceptable in management research as a means to connect theory and practice in context for the direct benefit of practitioners (Tranfield and Starkey 1998; Bryman and Bell 2015).

Consistent with a constructionist, pragmatist viewpoint, this present study takes a holistic, integrated approach to the research questions, and combines individual experiences and interpretations of service relationships against a contextualised backdrop. This was achieved through the application of qualitative research methods, but involved elements of quantitative measures where appropriate, such as in assessing the prevalence of emerging themes and the proportion of participants citing particular issues in their university's context.

6.5 Research Methods

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011) propose a three-stage model of the research process, and the research design for this study reflects their approach. The first stage is 'conceptualisation', through the review of extant literature as presented in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, and the formulation of research questions and development of a conceptual framework, as described in Chapter 5. The second stage is 'experiential', as data is generated and analysed, the process of which is outlined in Chapter 7. Finally, the 'inferential' stage refers to the process of developing explanatory theories and emerging themes which are grounded in the research data, and which are presented for this study in Chapters 8 to 12.

6.5.1 Secondary data

The process of conducting the search for relevant literature involved accessing scholarly literature using Business Source Complete (EBSCO 2019), Academic Search Complete (EBSCO 2019) and Scopus (Elsevier 2019) databases between October 2016 and February 2019. All articles in peer-reviewed academic journals relating to employee relations in a university or higher education context were searched, with a focus on those published after 1990, as these are most reflective of the current context of higher

education. Keywords were searched in the titles or abstracts of articles, and truncation and wildcards were used to ensure comprehensive results. Due to the focus of this research on employee-employee relationships, literature covering student experience and interactions, or external collaborations with industry partners or other institutions was set aside.

Keywords used included the following terms and their variants: employee relations, trust, interpersonal, team, collaboration, co-operation, collegiality, intra-organisation, management, organisation, relations, HR, personnel, staff, administration, culture, performance, effective, managerialism, power. In searching for articles on university professional services staff, the following terms and their variants were used: support service, professional service, support staff, general staff, non-academic, administration. Further relevant articles were identified through citations contained in the articles retrieved in the literature search. In total 175 Higher Education articles were included in this literature review, and analysis of their coverage identified the prevailing themes in this body of work. These themes are summarised in Table 2.1 in Chapter 2 and Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 above, and a full overview is contained in Appendix 1.

6.5.2 Primary data

For the experiential phase, this study collected primary data from university staff who regularly interacted with professional services colleagues. The research sought to uncover data which would encompass the experiences and reflections of individuals' working relationships with professional services staff. This need for in-depth reflection combined with a research focus on experiences and effects at the individual level led to the selection of interviewing as the main research method.

Interview method

Interviews allow the individual experiences as narrated by research participants to be captured, providing a rich seam of qualitative data in a way that cannot be achieved through a questionnaire (Saunders and Townsend 2016). The one-to-one, face-to-face interview provides the best approach for collecting such in-depth, personal perspectives. Interviews are able to produce 'thick descriptions' which provide insight and illumination of lived experience, and as collaborative social encounters they enable contrasting and complementary views to be gathered (Rapley 2007). A key benefit of the interview as a research method is the opportunity to gather large amounts of data quickly to provide

insight into lived experience, and to clarify and explore meanings at the time when these are being discussed (Marshall and Rossman 1995).

The degree of personal reflection required to generate in-depth understanding of the dynamics and effects of interpersonal relationships would not have been supported by a survey approach which does not enable open-ended responses. The survey method would also have limited the data to responses to questions posed, whereas interviewing allows for the potential of the conversation to cover unanticipated topics, and for clarifications or probing to occur as necessary. Such personal reflections and the sensitivities of relationships between colleagues dictated that conversations between researcher and participants should be held on a one-to-one basis, and therefore the focus group method was also ruled out.

Interviews in qualitative research can take different forms, depending on the degree of structure required to generate the data sought (Patton 2002). At one end of the spectrum, structured interviews comprise an interviewer-mediated survey, where the questions asked are standardised and do not deviate from the interview schedule to ensure that interactions with participants are consistent as far as possible across the sample. This approach allows for clarification and checking understanding of the questions posed, but otherwise follows a script. At the other end of the spectrum, the unstructured interview allows for a free-ranging conversation on the specified topic, in which the participant can express themselves clearly and without constraint.

Somewhere between these two extremes is the semi-structured interview, which uses a degree of standardisation in the questions posed to ensure that the same breadth and depth of information is received from all participants, but allows discretion on the part of the interviewer to probe responses and use follow-up questions in a more dynamic way than the structured approach allows (Legard, Keegan and Ward 2003). This combination of structure and flexibility enables researchers to focus on core topics to address their research questions, whilst at the same time giving primacy to the participant perspective and allowing them to influence the direction of the conversation according to their interests and insights (Rapley 2007). The semi-structured interview method was selected for this present study because it allowed for a consistent set of core interview questions to be used which mapped back to the aims of the research, as well as prioritising the views and voices of the participants. It provided the right combination of

structure and flexibility – structure to enable comparison across cases, and flexibility to provide scope for probing, iteration and generative discussion.

Given the potential for sensitive or complex information to emerge in discussions of relationships and an individual's feelings about colleagues and their workplace, one-to-one interviews were an appropriate research method for such a detailed investigation of an individual's perspective (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). The interviews were held in a private space as agreed by the participant, in the university workplace concerned. Best practice approaches to interviewing were employed to ensure that the method was used to greatest effect, for example paying attention to establishing rapport, timings, location and suitable environment (Ryen 2007; Patton 2002; Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the participant, and transcribed in full to provide the data in text form for subsequent analysis. Further detailed explanation of the data collection process is provided below in Chapter 7 Section 7.3.

6.5.3 Researcher as the research instrument

In interview-based qualitative studies the researcher is the research instrument, gathering the data through conversation, observation and interactions with research participants (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014). The position and stance of the interviewer are critical influences on the research process, and this interrelationship can be theorised differently depending on the epistemological and disciplinary perspective adopted. By way of illustration, Roulston (2010) theorised the interview method and characterised six understandings which link to epistemological positions, from neo-positivist, through constructionist to postmodern and decolonising. The key variable is the extent to which the position of the interviewer is allowed to influence the content and direction of the conversation. The 'romantic type' described by Roulston (2010) recognises the place of the researcher in the study, the relationship between participant and researcher, and the significance of rapport and trust in the interaction which is relied on to generate deep, self-revealing conversation. Taking an interpretive, pragmatic stance, this is the closest type to the approach employed in this study, and the interactions with interviewees fit this characterisation.

As a collaborative exercise, the role of the researcher in steering and directing the conversation should be recognised, and the extent to which the interviewer maintains a neutral stance will affect the nature of the conversation. For example, the degree of self-

disclosure on the part of the interviewer affects the development of rapport in the relationship, as it can be seen to indicate a level of trust and may encourage interviewees to offer fuller accounts of their own (Berger 2015). Some researchers will try to stand apart as a neutral observer and aim to minimise their impact on the thoughts of the interviewee, whilst others will use self-disclosure as a means to develop rapport and potentially produce co-created data as a result of the interaction. One of the key risks of self-disclosure is the potential for the responses to be affected by such exchange, as the interviewee may reciprocate and attempt to give answers that they think are expected. This can be mitigated to some extent by close monitoring of the interaction to ensure that the prime focus is on the interviewee's views (Legard, Keegan and Ward 2003), and this was the approach used in this study.

Establishing rapport is especially important if participants are expected to disclose sensitive information or reflect on their personal experiences and feelings. Face-to-face interviews are suitable for exploring meaning more deeply and for establishing empathy (Legard, Keegan and Ward 2003), and because depth of information was an important aim in this study, interviews were conducted in person rather than remotely. Indeed, differences in outcomes between face to face and telephone interviews were examined by Irvine, Drew and Sainsbury (2013), who found that interviewee responses tended to be shorter and less detailed in the latter than in face to face interviews. Patton (2002) also emphasises the importance of the interviewer providing feedback and positive reinforcement for the interviewee through verbal and non-verbal feedback to reassure them that their views are being actively listened to and that they are answering the questions as needed, and this is more effectively done though face-to-face encounters.

The practitioner-researcher

In the role of practitioner-researcher, reflexivity about the researcher's position in the research process is particularly important in order to ensure that personal experiences and perceptions do not shape those of the participants or the process of data collection and analysis. Reflexivity can be used as a tool to evaluate the impact of a researcher's position and perspective, and to allow methodological decisions and outcomes to be more clearly articulated (Finlay 2002). By recognising the power of the researcher in research practice to interact with and influence the data and data sources, reflective practices allow subjective decisions to be understood in those terms. In adopting an epistemology which is interpretive and in which knowledge production is understood to

be connected to the role of the researcher, reflexivity becomes of prime importance in preserving research quality.

An appropriate degree of reflexivity is vital for practitioner-researchers in order to counteract the drawbacks of the position, such as over-familiarity with the subject and prior knowledge which may bias the framing of the study. Once such measures are in place and regularly employed, the benefits of the position can outweigh the disadvantages. This position is supported by Miles, Huberman and Saldana who state:

> *On balance we believe that a savvy practitioner is often a better research instrument in a qualitative study [than someone unfamiliar with the setting]: sharper, more refined, more attentive, people-friendly, worldly-wise, and quicker to hone in on core processes and meanings about the case (2014:42).*

Reflections of a Practitioner-Researcher

As a practitioner-researcher with over 15 years' experience in university administration in two universities across a wide range of functions, my research aims were informed by my professional experience and personal reflections on the nature of workplace relationships of university professional services staff. My motivation for conducting this study stemmed from observing and being concerned about the lack of attention paid to the role of interpersonal relationships between colleagues in the design and delivery of professional services on campus, when in my own service encounters I had found these to be invaluable. In working to addressing service deficiencies, I observed how managers tended to focus on structures, processes and policies at the expense of relationships, losing sight of their significance in service quality. It was clear to me that practitioners lacked evidence of these more intangible ingredients of service exchange and their contribution in delivering internal service quality, and this study is therefore an attempt to address this professional need.

As well as providing the motivation for this research, my professional experience gave me a good understanding of the research context and an ability to connect quickly with participants as a result of shared experience. The rich data collected in the course of the interviews as a result of effective probing and follow-up questions is testament to the benefits of being a practitioner-researcher, as was the willingness of participants to engage in the study. A further benefit of my position as a practitioner-researcher was the ability to appreciate the nuances and implications of participants' experiences and to tease out details of the impact of their work relationships at both personal and institutional levels. To maximise these benefits, I took care to ensure that whilst my professional insights informed the scoping and operationalisation of the study, my personally-held views should not influence the contributions of participants.

I have been encouraged by the keen interest in the issues examined in this thesis as I have shared the findings through my professional networks and the UK's Association of University Administrators professional body. I hope this research resonates with the experiences of fellow professional services staff as well as their customer colleagues, and that the insights offered will provide the impetus for individuals and service managers to value and invest in their interpersonal relationships.

6.5.4 Research population

This research study sought to identify organisational as well as interpersonal factors affecting service use and experience, and as a result it was decided to conduct interviews with staff in more than one institution in order to test the effects of wider organisational contextual factors on workplace relationships. In the light of the literature review outlined in Chapter 2 concerning the implications of centralisation, this study was conducted in three universities representing the various degrees of centralisation to allow an exploration of how differing organisational structures and cultures may operate in providing the context for workplace relationships to play out. This contextual characteristic has a significant influence on how professional services are organised and delivered on campus.

Two universities were selected to represent the extremes of the spectrum of organisational models from centralised to devolved models, with the third university selected to represent a hybrid or middle ground between these two points. Site A is a research-intensive university with a traditional, highly devolved academic governance structure but with some centralised services, and Site C is a strongly centralised modern university. Site B is a research-intensive university which has a more empowered faculty structure than Site A, and relationships between schools and centralised university management are evolving towards greater centralisation.

An element of convenience sampling was used in that sites were selected on the basis of geographic accessibility and were within one hour's travelling time from the researcher's base. The decision to conduct face-to-face interviews because of the importance of establishing rapport meant that travel time to reach the participant could be a significant logistical issue for the researcher. Given that outside London the HE sector in regional England is relatively homogenous, this approach could be justified in order to carry out this study within resource and time constraints. Where possible, interviews were scheduled in groups of two or three per day to use researcher time as effectively as possible.

Permission was sought and granted from senior leaders at the three institutions selected to conduct the study with their staff, to enable the research to be carried out in an ethical, transparent manner. Recognising that there may be political sensitivities uncovered during the course of the study, institutions and individuals were assured of anonymity

throughout the course of the research and its publication. Anticipating that there would be an interest in the findings of the study by senior managers in universities, an element of reciprocity was incorporated into the access agreement, such as a closed-door discussion of the findings which would provide greater detail for the institution concerned to assist with understanding the implications and designing appropriate responses.

6.5.5 Sampling strategy and participant selection

As it is not feasible to interview all users of professional services in universities, this study involved a sample from the overall staff population. Approaches to sampling differ depending on whether probability or non-probability methods are used (Ruane 2005). Probability sampling tends to be used in large scale, quantitative studies where a representative sample is needed which minimises bias and sampling error, and samples are generated by random selection. Non-probability or 'purposive' sampling is often used in qualitative studies and does not use random selection, but deliberately selects participants according to their particular characteristics or experiences relating to the research question in an effort to achieve rich data and a variety of responses. Purposive sampling does not generate generalisable results, rather the approach aims to produce a wide variety of perspectives and range of experiences (Bryman and Bell 2015). The selection of cases in purposive sampling does not aim to produce statistical generalisability, but according to Curtis et al. (2000) can enable analytic generalisations to be made as rich qualitative data illuminates the theoretical and conceptual discussion. A purposive sampling approach was used in this study to select cases which had the potential to provide insights about the phenomena described in the research questions (Patton 2002).

The sampling frame for this study was the staff of the three universities selected for study who have ongoing working relationships with their professional services colleagues. Research data was collected and examined at the individual unit of analysis, as it was the individual interpretations of service usage experience which was of primary interest. By drawing on the conceptual framework and research questions presented in Chapter 5 above, the sampling strategy followed established practice in qualitative research to ensure that cases selected provided a deep understanding of the issues through contrasting and comparative views and perspectives (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014).

Sampling in qualitative research is usually an iterative process, as sampling strategies are tested and monitored through their application in naturalistic settings, and adjustments are made to ensure the strategy is delivered (Robinson 2014). In this study, the primary sampling strategy was criterion sampling in that participants were selected based on their meeting pre-determined criteria (Patton 2002). The sample needed to consist of individuals who have a regular need to engage with professional service colleagues in the course of their work, and in ways which include the possibility of an interpersonal relationship developing over time. The survey population can be segmented in various ways, and it was important to generate a sample population which covers these variations. Key categories were whether staff were academic, non-academic or institutional managers, and whether they were junior or senior staff. A purposive sampling process was therefore appropriate to ensure that the participants were able to draw on relevant experience to generate research data.

The selection criteria for cases in this study were as follows:

- Staff who had been in their current post for at least one year.
- Staff who were in positions where service use had the potential to contribute to both operational and strategic aspects of their work. For academic staff this tended to be those who had some degree of management responsibility in addition to their academic role which required regular engagement with a professional service, for example as a Head of School, Director of Admissions or Course Director. For non-academic staff, individuals who operated at a strategic level or had responsibility for delivering a function were sought.
- Staff who relied on internal services to be able to carry out their responsibilities to their own customers, whether these were other staff, students or external stakeholders.

In addition to the criteria for the selection of individual cases, the sampling strategy aimed to achieve a broad range of perspectives to reflect the diversity and variations within university staffing. Consistent with the proportion of staff in each category at a national level, the sampling strategy aimed to achieve an equal mix of academic and non-academic participants. Participants were also selected such that the collection of cases included individuals from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, covering the three broad academic areas of science and engineering, arts and humanities and social sciences. Staff from non-academic functions were also included where the function provided a

service to academic staff or students, and they were selected to achieve a range of views across the diverse set of services on campus. To achieve some consistency and a spread of experience across different functions, non-academic participants were targeted who performed similar functions in all three sites, such as academic department administration, library services, research support, IT services and student services.

6.5.6 Sample size

Expectations and norms of sample size vary between qualitative and quantitative research methods, because the purpose of enquiry differs. If a study aims to produce statistical generalisability, then the sample size will need to reflect this according to the size of the sample population. If a study is more exploratory and speculative, then a smaller sample of less than 20 for interview-based qualitative research may be justified (Crouch and McKenzie 2006). Even when focusing on this one method as deployed in this current research, there is no consensus as to how many interviews might be considered sufficient to draw credible conclusions, although a number of scholars have tried to establish one. In qualitative studies, a relatively small number of participants can be used to provide illustrative data, as findings are not intended to be generalisable (Cresswell 2007). For this study, the sample used needed to be large enough to provide the opportunity to identify themes, as well as to facilitate cross-sample analysis and comparisons between the three sites.

Baker and Edwards (2012) answer the question 'how many interviews is enough?' with the answer 'it depends', and point to epistemological, methodological and practical factors which will determine the answer for each study on a case-by-case basis. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) suggest that a single study using individual interviews would typically have a sample size of under 50, unless there was clear justification to include more. In an attempt to establish accepted norms for sample size, Saunders and Townsend (2016) analysed 248 qualitative studies in organisation and workplace research to examine established practice for the number of interview participants. They found that the range was between 1 and 330, and deemed 15-60 as the normal range, with 30 recommended as an initial estimate for research into a single organisation and 50 recommended as an initial estimate for multiple sites.

The exploratory nature of qualitative research means that it is often not possible to determine how many interviews are needed at the outset (e.g. Baker and Edwards 2012).

As a result, sample size may be most appropriately determined as the research progresses, through the monitoring of the data collection process and altering the sample size within agreed parameters if more cases are required (Robinson 2014). Likewise, Saunders and Townsend (2016) suggest a pragmatic approach be used where an indication of the target sample size is given at the outset and the actual number then be determined through the research process, and be recorded and justified according to data conditions at the end. Whatever the sample size used, researchers must recognise the limitations of sampling, and be mindful not to make inappropriate inferences or draw conclusions which go beyond what the data can support (Baker and Edwards 2012).

Based on scholarly norms outlined in the above paragraphs, this current study aimed for a maximum of 20 interviews per site, and an upper limit of 60 interviews in total across the three institutions. Noting the importance of continuous monitoring during the data collection phase, an initial target of 15 potential participants for each site was set, and then the data gathered was reassessed to determine whether the sampling criteria was being met. This then allowed the opportunity and flexibility to supplement the sample by selecting additional participants to meet the criteria where more representation of key variables was needed.

6.5.7 Saturation

If the purpose of sampling is to maximise information sought, then sampling should stop at the point at which no new information is emerging from new samples (Patton 2002). This point is viewed in qualitative research as the point of saturation, where no new insights are achieved from new cases. Originating in grounded theory, the concept of saturation can be taken to mean data saturation, theory saturation or thematic saturation, and there is scope for confusion as to which element is claimed to be saturated (O'Reilly and Parker 2013). These authors argue that saturation as a generic marker of research quality and rigour is not always appropriate, and that the concept should be applied in keeping with the epistemological perspective adopted. In any case, the process of achieving saturation should be rigorous and thorough, and researchers should be transparent about what is meant by saturation, and how saturation was determined (Bowen 2008).

A number of studies have attempted to find a common understanding of what saturation means on a practical level, how it can be determined, and how it relates to sample size.

For instance, Constantinou, Georgiou and Perdikogianni (2017) propose a comparative method for assessing whether theme saturation has been reached, and found that the threshold in their study was reached at the eighth case. In Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) the authors systematically documented the degree of saturation and variability over the course of thematic analysis, and observed that saturation is likely to differ according to heterogeneity of population. They found that saturation was reached at twelve interviews in a relatively homogenous population, and recommend that saturation be used to determine sample size.

As noted in Section 6.5.5 in relation to sample size, it is difficult in qualitative studies to determine when saturation is likely to be met, as the degree of variability in a sample population is often not identified until field work is in progress (Gobo 2007). An alternative perspective on saturation distances the concept from sample size, as saturation may not always be a good determinant of the right sample size for the study. Saunders and Townsend (2016) argue that not reaching saturation does not necessarily mean that findings are not valid or are insufficient, only that the phenomenon has not yet been fully explored. O'Reilly and Parker (2013: 192) emphasise sample adequacy rather than saturation, linking sample size with the purpose of the research such that "an adequate sample size is one that sufficiently answers the research question." The sufficiency of the data to answer the research question will usually require some initial data analysis to identify themes and common threads, and therefore a flexible and iterative approach to data collection and data analysis is required.

Reflecting on these methodological discussions, it became clear that the data collection and data analysis phases of this research study would need to be understood as cyclical and interrelated, and should be conducted concurrently in order to benefit from early insights and to inform the sampling strategy. 'Sample adequacy' was determined using thematic saturation as a guide, recording the number of new themes which emerged through the coding of each interview transcript, in order to monitor the extent of new insights yielded from each interview. Further detail of the analytical approaches used is given in the next chapter. Whilst these research techniques are thus presented separately in this thesis, the two processes were in fact carried out side-by-side during the data collection phase so that the sampling strategy could be closely monitored.

6.5.8 Ethical considerations

This study was carried out in accordance with the highest standards of ethical behaviour, with appropriate permissions, data protection and confidentiality agreements in place and adhered to. The study was conducted in compliance with Coventry University's 'Principles and Standards of Conduct on the Governance of Research', 'Disclosure Protocol' and 'Data Protection Policy'. The research project received ethical approval from Coventry University on 18 November 2017 in advance of the data collection phase, and documentation is included in Appendix 2 of this thesis for reference.

Protecting participants

Full consideration was given to the needs of participants for strict confidentiality and anonymity, and this was assured as a condition of primary data collection. Given the potential for sensitive or personal data about work colleagues, working practices or organisational challenges to be shared during interviews, this condition was established in advance using a participant information sheet and the signing of an informed consent form (see Appendices 5 and 6). In this way participants were assured about steps taken to protect their privacy and anonymity, and any risk of harm was mitigated. In addition, it was confirmed that anyone mentioned in the course of discussions would have their identity protected also. Under these conditions, the participants were able to speak freely, candidly and without prejudice, leading to the collection of valuable, rich data which may not have otherwise been possible. Underpinned by the principle of informed consent, the communications between researcher and participant in advance of the interview as well as during the discussion enabled trust and rapport to develop (Ryen 2007). Participants also received a tailored summary of the study's findings when it was complete so that they were informed about the outcomes of their involvement and the contribution they made (see Appendix 11.).

Responsible data handling

All data was collected, handled and stored securely and in accordance with data protection regulations and Coventry University's policies. Data was anonymised so that no individual could be identified from responses given. Individuals were assigned a numerical code to distinguish between participants, and institutions were assigned a letter to maintain anonymity whilst allowing data from each site to be analysed and compared.

Further detailed descriptions of actions taken and decisions made in the data collection and analysis phases of this study are included in the next chapter.

6.5.9 Data analysis approach

Initially taking an inductive approach to data analysis, the qualitative data from the semi-structured interview stage were analysed using a thematic approach which is consistent with a pragmatic perspective. Various scholars have helpfully documented the process for systematic identification of themes, and this present research draws on existing good practice to ensure rigour and consistency (for example Ryan and Bernard 2003; Braun and Clarke 2006). For instance, the framework method as described by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) provides a structured approach to an iterative, cyclical and emergent strategy, and allows the researcher to clearly document the decisions made to arrive at a set of themes which are grounded in the empirical data.

Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) NVivo (QSR 2017) was used to manage the data and theme identification through the application of coding, and to record the connections and linkages between data elements. This software was selected for use due to its functionality in supporting the classification, analysis and thematic presentation of qualitative data, and its flexibility for researchers to develop hierarchical schemes to capture relationships between concepts and data sets (Kelle 2007). Further detailed explanation of the analytical approach taken is presented in the next chapter.

6.6 Research reliability

Quantitative research data can be tested for reliability, validity and generalisability using objective and statistical techniques in ways not readily transferrable or appropriate for qualitative research data. For instance, the validity of quantitative data can be judged in terms of whether the research is replicable by another study, whilst qualitative research does not aim to be replicable because so much is contingent on particular circumstances and conditions at one moment in time (Marshall and Rossman 1995). The dynamic nature of social subjects, the ways in which an individual's perceptions and behaviours are influenced by conditions and psychological states at any one time, and the way in which data is contingent on the specifics of the interaction between interviewer and participant make replicability of qualitative data an impossibility (Rapley 2007).

Nonetheless, the importance of establishing rigour, quality and reliability for qualitative research data remains (Bryman and Bell 2015).

In qualitative studies, the trustworthiness and reliability of research is more readily equated with credibility rather than validity (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Rigour in research design and operationalisation and robustness of data can demonstrate credibility of research evidence, as can whether the study adequately represents the phenomenon in question such that inferences can be made to support generalisation (Lewis and Ritchie 2003). Credibility of findings can be established through coding rigour, including the detailed documentation of decisions and cross-checking of data against coding schemes (Cresswell 2007). The use of rigorous methods to yield high quality data containing meaningful insights also supports the credibility of the researcher in generating new understandings (Patton 2002). Seale (2007) proposes how research quality can be ascertained through the consideration of internal and external logic. Internal means include demonstrating links between the research questions and the research philosophy, design, methods, claims and evidence, whilst external tests include the relevance, consequences, application and purpose of the research.

For the purposes of this current study, research reliability is understood according to the five standards for qualitative research quality set out by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) and shown in Table 6.3, which summarise established understandings outlined above. These standards have guided the implementation of this research study.

Table 6.3: Summary of standards for the quality of conclusions

	Quality standard	*Application to research*
1	Objectivity / confirmability	Researcher is explicit and transparent about biases, methods, procedures employed and data used
2	Reliability / dependability / auditability	Research is conducted with integrity, consistency, and with reasonable care and controls, with congruence between research questions and research design
3	Internal validity / credibility / authenticity	Research findings are plausible, meaningful, clear, coherent, connect with research questions and are evidenced in research data
4	External validity / transferability / fittingness	Research data provides 'thick' descriptions which generate meaning and resonance, allowing readers to judge transferability to other contexts and consistency with own experiences

5	Utilisation / application / action orientation	Research findings are accessible, useful, can be applied for wider benefit and create usable knowledge.

(Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014: 315-320)

Recognising that truths can be partial and spoken from a particular standpoint (Seale 2007), the reliability of the qualitative research data for this current study is rooted in the primacy of the evidence gathered, mitigating researcher bias and ensuring that findings are not the personal opinion of the researcher but represent the perspectives of the participants. An audit trail has been maintained to allow for scrutiny and verification, demonstrating data collection protocols, analytical routes employed and interpretations made. Bias was minimised by focusing solely on what was articulated by participants and where underlying meanings could be clearly identified in the conversations. The study's research questions informed the research design, conduct and analysis at every stage throughout the process in order to ensure internal validity of the research. All methodological decisions stemmed from the research questions and the conceptual model, and have been documented and justified, implementing standard practice for rigorous qualitative research (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014). Evidence from the interview data gathered across the three institutions was corroborated through a second set of interviews with institutional gatekeepers which provided an opportunity to test findings and recommendations.

Chapter summary

This chapter establishes the basis for the empirical research undertaken, and explains the philosophical, methodological, ethical and practical considerations and decisions involved in conducting this study. These approaches are presented as clearly as possible to enable scrutiny of the research approach and to illustrate the rigour with which this study was conducted. The next chapter discusses in detail the data collection and data analysis stages of this study, including the pilot study which tested the methodological decisions outlined here in this chapter.

CHAPTER 7: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter builds on the methodological discussion in Chapter 6 to give specific details of the data collection and analysis process employed in this study. It covers each stage of the investigation and explains decisions made and the rationale behind them, drawing on methodological literature and accepted research practice where applicable. Each section covers a key element of the data collection process, and sets out the main practical and theoretical issues which have been addressed. In this way the chapter provides an explanation of the data collection and analysis methods used in order to enable scrutiny of the research process.

7.1 Interview schedule

The design of the interview schedule for this study ensured that key questions were asked in a consistent way across all interviews to minimise variation in how the questions were posed in each interview and to enable some comparative analysis. (The full schedule is included in Appendix 7 for reference). The design also allowed for probing sub-questions to be tailored in response to information provided, enabling further exploration of ideas and experiences and the same levels of breadth and depth of information to be yielded from all participants. The standardised, open-ended interview approach was selected, as set out by Patton (2002), using a variety of question types and considering the ordering of questions to allow the interviewee to familiarise themselves with the topic and for the sequence of questions to be experienced as a logical flow. Neutral, non-leading questions were used, along with transition statements to introduce changes in topic, or to flag a question which may have needed time to digest in order to answer fully. This was particularly important when the interview questions moved from a general, contextual focus to asking for more specific examples of working relationships requiring more personal reflection.

Table 7.1 maps each of the interview questions against the research questions for this study, and details the theoretical underpinnings as well as the aims of each question. This mapping was carried out in advance of conducting the interviews to ensure that the data retrieved would be capable of providing evidence to answer the research questions.

All the questions were open questions, such that the participants could state their responses however they chose, and were encouraged to be more descriptive than a

simple yes / no answer. The first question aimed to elicit factual data about service use in order to locate the conversation and to begin the discussion in a low-risk manner. The next question started to explore experiences and expectations of services in a generalised sense, and helped to familiarise the participant with the focus of the interview. Questions three, four and five were the key questions which probed participant experiences, perceptions and judgements about their working relationships, and the conversation moved from abstract notions of service quality to specific experiences, thoughts and emotions encountered through relationships. Question six sought reflections from participants beyond the specific examples they had drawn on, to explore the longer-term outcomes of relationship quality. Question seven then posed a hypothetical question about an ideal world scenario to explore participants' priorities and expectations of services in a slightly different way, freeing individuals to consider their needs as customers without the constraints of the real world.

In addition to the formal interview questions, data were also gathered in anonymised form about the work history of each participant and their personal details (gender, age range and ethnicity). These data enabled subsequent analysis by each variable and helped in monitoring the characteristics of the sample as it developed. The work history questions were used as part of the introductory conversation to form a personal connection, whilst the personal details were gathered at the end of the formal interview in order that these potentially intrusive questions did not hinder the development of rapport.

Table 7.1: Mapping of interview questions across the thesis questions

Interview questions	*Purpose of question*	*RQ1: What interpersonal / organisational factors influence the customer's expectations, experience and outcomes of university professional service use?*	*RQ2: What is the association between the interpersonal relationship and the customer's perceptions of service quality?*	*RQ3: How does relationship quality affect the customer's attitudes, behaviours and actions?*	*Links to theory*
1. Which professional support services do you rely on most heavily to help you in your work?	Opener, established importance of service types for participant	x			HE context; service eco-system; interdependency
2. What is your general opinion of professional services support in this university?	Explored general outlook and attitudes towards professional services, probes expectations	x		x	HE context; service quality; service performance
2a. What does service quality mean to you from a customer perspective?	Probed expectations and working definition		x		Service quality
3. Please could you give me an example of a working relationship with a professional service colleague which is / has been particularly positive / productive? 3a. What do you value most about the relationship? 3b. Has the quality of the relationship influenced your decision to use the service again in future?	Focused on practical, real example as case study to ground discussion. Follow up questions probed commitment / loyalty / future actions and attitudes	x	x	x	Relationship quality; social exchange and social embeddedness; OCB; commitment; satisfaction; trust; reciprocity
4. Please could you give me an example of a working relationship with a professional service colleague which is / was not so positive?	Focused on practical, real example as case study to ground discussion. Follow up	x	x	x	Relationship quality; social exchange and social embeddedness; OCB; commitment;

4a. What do you find most disappointing about the relationship? 4b. Has the quality of the relationship influenced your decision to use the service again in future?	questions probed commitment / loyalty / future actions and attitudes				satisfaction; trust; reciprocity
5. In your opinion, what makes the difference between working relationships with support staff which are positive and those which are not?	Concentrated on relationship quality to identify key elements for participant	x	x	x	Relationship quality; social exchange; cognitive and affective dimensions; service quality and satisfaction
6a. What benefits have positive relationships brought for your work?	Aimed to identify specific / actual outcomes of relationship quality		x	x	Social exchange; relationship quality; service performance
6b. What are the consequences for you when these relationships have been less positive?	Aimed to identify specific / actual outcomes of relationship quality		x	x	Social exchange; relationship quality; service performance
7. In an ideal world, what would your working relationships with professional service colleagues be like? 7a. What difference would it make to you in your role if all your working relationships were like this?	Alternative approach to above questions used hypothetical question to explore values, expectations and outcomes.		x	x	Relationship quality; social exchange; service perspective; service performance; value co-creation and resource integration
8. Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't covered, but which you think is important to this study?	Open question in case discussion raised other relevant issues which are important to the participant	x	x	x	

7.2 Pilot study

In preparation for the empirical research stage, a pilot study was conducted in December 2017 to test the draft schedule of interview questions and the interviewing approach outlined in Chapter 6 Section 6.5.2. Pilot studies can help to refine the research instrument used, such as the interview schedule, as well as to highlight gaps and wastage in data collection to enable the main study to be planned and conducted more effectively with a greater understanding of the resources and time required (Sampson 2004). A small-scale test can help to identify flaws and imperfections in research design so that these can be addressed for the main research study (Gudmundsdottir and Brock-Utne 2010). Interview questions also benefit from refinement following testing in a pilot study, to ensure that the meaning of questions is clear to participants and that the responses generated are of the nature anticipated (Saldana 2011). The pilot study also allows audio recording equipment to be tested in a live situation, and for the logistics of conducting the planned data collection to be well understood. The six participants chosen for the pilot study were selected by purposive sampling to meet the criteria established for the main data collection exercise detailed in Chapter 6 Section 6.5.5, and half were academic staff and half were non-academic staff, to reflect the balance in the target population.

The pilot study was conducted in two parts, following established practice in interviewing for research as outlined in Chapter 6 Section 6.5.2. The first stage tested the interview questions with three participants, and was followed by an evaluation of the effectiveness of the questions when compared with the research questions, conceptual framework and theoretical underpinnings of this study. In the second stage, the draft questions were revised in the light of the evaluation of the first stage, and the updated set of questions was tested with a further three participants. The approach was subsequently evaluated as in the first stage. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent, and conducted with due regard to confidentiality and anonymity as described in Chapter 6 Section 6.5.8. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes each, and were then transcribed by the researcher and coded using NVivo software (QSR 2017).

7.2.1 Stage 1 evaluation

The evaluation of the first stage of the pilot study indicated that participants' responses contained insights and 'thick descriptions' which related to the themes highlighted in the

literature review, therefore confirming that the focus of the questions was appropriate for the research questions. The evaluation signalled where greater clarity was needed in the wording of questions, such as the distinction between a service encounter and an ongoing service relationship, and where more probing of service or organisational context was needed in order to gain a full picture of the situation. In addition, the initial analysis indicated that the draft questions did not directly address the potential link between service quality and relationship quality, such that participant responses only implicitly touched on this issue. Whilst the original intention was not to include a direct question on this topic to avoid leading participants to making connections which they might not otherwise have done, the evaluation indicated that adding a probing question which directly explores this link would be beneficial.

7.2.2 Stage 2 evaluation

For the second stage of the pilot study, two additional questions were added to further draw out the participant's views and expectations of service quality and their use of professional service support. One question explicitly asked respondents to comment on what service quality meant to them, and this drew out their expectations as a customer in terms of standards, but also allowed the interviewer to pick up on the language used in relation to service provision and their knowledge of a service perspective. The second question asked participants to address a hypothetical question about professional service support in an ideal world, providing them with an opportunity to describe their expectations in a way which was separate from their current experience. The resulting data would allow a gap analysis to be conducted between current service levels and hoped-for service levels. The evaluation of the second set of interviews confirmed that the revised interview question schedule met the needs of the study more fully and it was decided that this version would be the schedule used in the main study.

In reviewing the responses from the pilot study interviews to the final question concerning any other points which the participant would like to add, the comments given were interesting in the broader HE context, but were not directly relevant to this study. Therefore no further questions were identified as missing from the schedule, but this final question was retained in order to provide opportunities to capture staff concerns around the subject of professional service support more generally. The question also rebalanced the power relationship in the interview context to a certain degree, such that

the participant had control over part of the conversation and the sense of having 'the last word'. Table 7.1 details the final set of interview questions used in the full study.

Following each interview, each participant was asked for feedback on the experience of being interviewed and on the questions they had been asked. All participants responded with positive feedback about the clarity and logical flow of the questions, and that the sequencing of the questions made sense to them as interviewees. The academic staff participants commented that the topic in question was important to them given their day-to-day experience in the workplace, but that they had not given it much thought in the past.

The coding of the interview data in NVivo (QSR 2017) allowed the software capabilities to be tested, the initial concepts to be identified, and an analytical framework to start to emerge. A loose structure of codes which mapped against the conceptual framework was put in place, and this was then populated through inductive coding of the transcript data. Whilst at pilot stage this was embryonic, it was sufficient to indicate the presence of theoretical constructs and confirm the adequacy of the data gleaned from interviews.

In conclusion, the pilot study provided an opportunity to test and refine the data collection and analysis approaches, and the full study has benefitted from the insights gained as a result. The researcher was also able to confirm that the practical elements of data collection and the skills needed for collection and analysis were in place and appropriate for the full study to commence.

7.3 Data collection

This section explains the steps taken in collecting data for the full study, detailing the specific approaches used and decisions made in the course of this empirical research stage. The characteristics of the sample achieved are also presented.

7.3.1 Access and participant recruitment

As outlined in Chapter 6 Section 6.5.3, three HE institutions were identified as suitable research sites. The first stage in gaining access to participants was to seek agreement from a senior representative at each institution that this study could be conducted with their staff. A member of the senior leadership team from each university who had responsibility for human resources or staff development functions was formally

approached using an introductory letter (see Appendix 3), and this initial contact was followed up with a meeting to discuss further details of the proposal. In each case once the detailed discussion had been held, the institutional gatekeeper gave permission for the research to be carried out in their institution, and agreed to facilitate the study as needed. Conscious of the value of such institutional permission, a reciprocal offer was made to share the anonymised findings of this study with each institution at the conclusion of the project, and this was welcomed in all cases.

Once permission to conduct the research had been granted, the institutional gatekeepers each provided valuable information in confidence to assist in understanding the local context and any sensitivities to be aware of in the course of conducting the interviews. This intelligence was extremely useful in being able to convey empathy and understanding of specific local issues, and also allowed the researcher to be considered as a trusted insider on some occasions. The gatekeepers also helped in identifying potential research participants which met the sampling criteria, and these were supplemented with contacts from the researcher's professional networks across the region. Where participants were sought to fill gaps in the sample, public information from the three university websites were used to identify potential participants who met the criteria.

Once a target list for each site had been drawn up, individuals were contacted directly via email (see Appendix 4) to ask if they would be prepared to participate, enclosing the full participant information sheet for additional information (see Appendix 5). On receipt of a positive response, a mutually convenient date and venue was agreed, and a suitable meeting space was booked to ensure safety and confidentiality. In total 64 individuals were contacted and 50 interviews were carried out between January and July 2018, generating a 78% success rate. Those who did not participate either did not respond to the email, or were not available to be interviewed during the research period in question.

7.3.2 Interview process

For the purposes of this study, there was no requirement for individuals or institutions to be identifiable as it was the phenomenon of the work relationship which was the unit of analysis, and therefore agreement to participate was on the basis that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained. The three sites are not identified by name, and their characteristics are common across the sector such that their identity would not be

apparent from any broad description of their organisational structures. The confidentiality and anonymity of individual participants was discussed before each interview commenced, and participants signed the informed consent form to confirm that they had understood and consented to participate (see Appendix 6). In line with Ryen (2007), the duty of the researcher to protect identity and anonymity was enacted, and this helped participants to feel more confident in speaking about their working relationships more freely than might otherwise have been the case. Participants were also assured that there was no requirement for them to use names when describing their relationships with colleagues, but that if they did those names would not be transcribed. This approach ensured that neither participants nor their colleagues would be identifiable or traceable in the reporting of this research.

Established protocol for conducting research interviews was followed to ensure that data collection was rigorous and effective (Patton 2002). On first meeting the participant for the interview, their understanding of the purpose and nature of the interview was checked, and the aims of the research outlined again so that it was fresh in their minds. Before commencing each formal interview, the participant was asked about any time constraints in case the flow of questions needed adapting, and the definitions of 'professional services' and 'relationship' were clarified for the purposes of this research. At the end of each interview the participant was thanked in person for their time and insights provided, and a follow-up email was sent to thank them again for their involvement.

7.3.3 Establishing rapport

Throughout the data collection phase there were many instances where the interviewees described situations which resonated strongly with the researcher's own experiences. Knowing that this would be highly likely, and with the prime concern being to prioritise the views of the participants, a conscious decision was made at the outset to state clearly that during the interview the focus of the conversation would be the perceptions and experiences of the participant. However, at the start of each interview the opportunity was taken to discuss the motivations for this current study, and to establish some common ground and rapport as the basis for the conversation. The researcher's familiarity as a practitioner within the context of the research was helpful as the backdrop of the interviews, as noted by Marshall and Rossman (1995), as it enabled trust and rapport to be developed very quickly in the introductory discussion. When shared

experiences were uncovered during the course of the interview, this was acknowledged through non-verbal communication only. If it seemed appropriate and if the participant had time when the interview had been completed, common experiences were discussed to consolidate the rapport which had been established at the outset. This enabled the twin desires for rapport and neutrality to be balanced appropriately, whilst prioritising the interviewee's insights and perceptions and recognising interviews as co-operative activities (Rapley 2007).

7.3.4 Audio recording and transcription

The decision to audio-record each interview stemmed from the needs of the data analysis approach, such that verbatim records of what was said would be vital for subsequent content analysis. Whilst the conversations had the potential to cover sensitive issues, it was felt that the focus on the workplace evoked a professional context, and that therefore audio recording would not be perceived as overly intrusive. In fact, many interviewees were familiar and accepting of the need for audio recording for research data collection purposes because they themselves conducted academic research.

The need for the permission of the interviewee to audio record the conversation was explained in the participant information sheet sent to individuals in advance of the interview, and agreement was checked before each interview commenced, and confirmed by the signing of the informed consent form. All participants in this study agreed to audio recording of the conversation. The audio recorder was turned on at the start of the formal interview once initial introductions had been completed, and recording was stopped once the interviewee had been thanked and the interview was concluded. Each audio recording was saved with common file structure containing the participant identification number for easy reference.

All the interviews were transcribed to enable deeper familiarisation and immersion in the data, with the commensurate opportunities this brought for emergent insights to be revealed at an early stage (Patton 2002). McLellan, MacQueen and Neidig (2003) draw attention to interview transcription as an important research activity, not just a technical detail, and assert the importance of preparation and consistency in approach to transcripts to facilitate effective analysis. Mindful of the requirements of content analysis for the next stage of this research, a protocol was established for transcription to ensure

consistency across the data set, and then a transcription template was used to facilitate this approach.

With the focus of this study being the content of the interviewee's perceptions and reflections, the verbatim transcription of what was said was the priority. Whilst methods such as discourse analysis demand full transcription including non-verbal and background sounds, this level of detail was not required for this study. The transcription protocol therefore included the need for verbatim reporting, and no attempt was made to record non-verbal sounds, although intonation and speech patterns were recorded where possible through the punctuation used in the transcript. The recordings were transcribed in full as all content had the potential to be relevant given the semi-structured nature of the conversations. If names of individuals were mentioned they were not transcribed in full but were assigned an initial so that repeated references could be followed in the transcript.

7.3.5 Data management and preparation

Systematic and consistent application of a data management approach is vital in enabling data to be properly recorded, retrieved and analysed. A file management system was implemented to ensure that the data yielded from the interviews was managed effectively, including a common file-naming system containing the participant ID code, and a series of labelled folders to organise the files for ease of retrieval. The research data was stored in a password-protected area of the Coventry University network, and regularly backed-up using networked and non-networked solutions.

All data collected were stored for reference and as an audit trail to demonstrate research rigour. For instance, the audio files have been retained such that if needed the interviews could be listened to again as well as having been transcribed into text. Each transcript was reviewed for accuracy and to eliminate typographical errors, and then uploaded into NVivo software (QSR 2017) ready for analysis. Case data collected from participants was also uploaded in order that analysis by case variables could be carried out. Paper copies of the interview schedule used with each participant as well as the signed informed consent forms were stored in a locked archive to protect confidentiality, and to provide evidence of research practice should it be required.

7.4 Sample characteristics

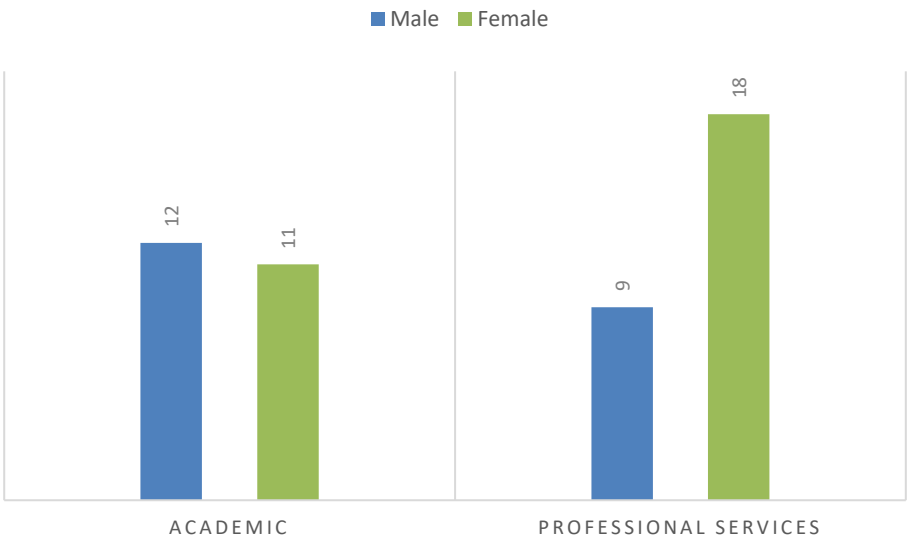
Each participant was asked to provide additional data about their personal circumstances so that data could be analysed according to these variables. Table 7.2 shows the categories of data collected and the number of cases counted in each category. Full details of case classifications are included in Appendix 8.

Table 7.2: Sample characteristics

Characteristic	***Categories used for analysis***	***Number of cases***
Site	Site A Site B Site C	16 16 18
Staff type	Academic Professional Services (PS)	23 27
Gender	Male Female	21 29
Age bracket	Under 30 30-39 40-49 50+	0 5 21 24
Ethnicity (Self-reported categories)	White British White European Mixed Black British Caribbean British Indian	43 4 1 1 1
Field / discipline	Humanities Sciences Social sciences Support functions	6 20 12 12
Job role	Early career academic Mid career academic Senior academic Head of department / school Manager Departmental operations manager Senior Manager	3 4 8 8 7 14 6
Time in role	Under 3 years 3-5 years 6-10 years Over 10 years	19 17 6 8
Length of service in university	Under 5 years 5-10 years 11-20 years Over 20 years	7 10 23 10
Experience in another institution	Yes No	25 25

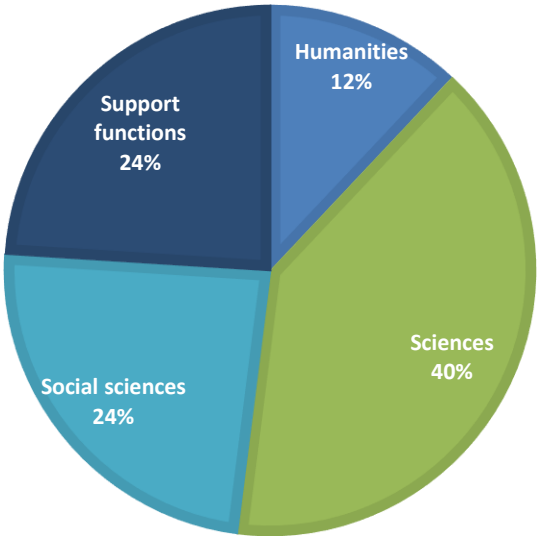
The sample selection strategy was used to achieve a balance of characteristics in staff type, gender, disciplinary mix and job role, as illustrated in Figures 7.1 – 7.3 below. The sampling criteria which required staff to have a degree of management responsibility and to inhabit a role which required regular contact with professional services staff is likely to have been a factor in the age profile of the participants, with the majority of cases being over 40 years of age. Time in role, length of service in the university and prior experience provide the context for some responses but were not criteria for sample selection.

Figure 7.1: Sample characteristics for gender and staff type



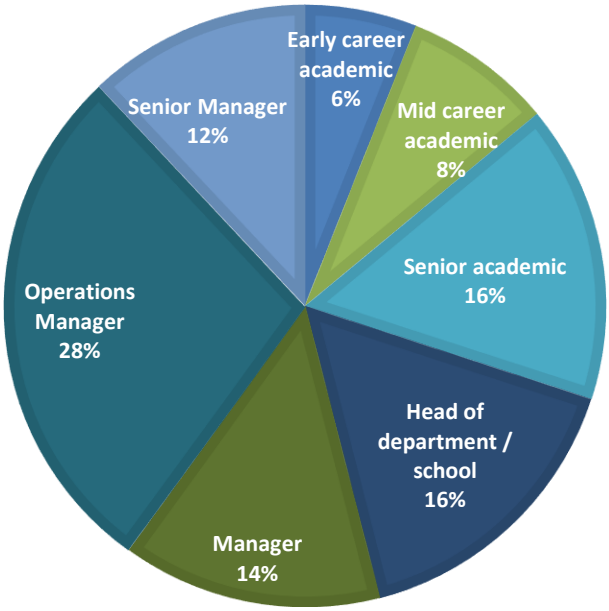
There was a greater proportion of female professional services staff interviewed, and this reflects the gender balance for this staff type across the sector (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2018).

Figure 7.2: Sample characteristics for field / discipline



Participants from Humanities were less well-represented in the sample, but this also reflects the distribution of staff numbers across the disciplines in the three sites covered by this study.

Figure 7.3: Sample characteristics for job role



The age profile of academic staff to a large degree reflects the sample selection criteria of having some degree of management responsibility, as early career academics are

less likely to hold these roles. Senior academics were those who were at professorial level but who did not hold Head of Department positions. Whilst Heads of Department were likely to also be senior academics, these two categories were kept separate because their priorities and interests may not be the same.

7.5 Data analysis

This section outlines the steps taken to analyse the qualitative data yielded from the in-depth interviews. The analytical technique employed was thematic analysis, which aims to make sense out of qualitative information to identify themes, patterns and meanings (Patton 2002). The analysis aimed to establish substantive significance of the data, in terms of convergence or divergence with theoretical understandings, and development of theoretical insights and a coherent perspective on working relationships of professional services staff in the HE sector. Thematic analysis is highly dependent on the quality of the raw data and the process of organising the data through coding (Boyatzis 1998), and therefore a detailed account is provided of these research processes to illustrate how the thematic analysis was achieved.

The first step in analysing the outputs from the qualitative interviews was to code the data using NVivo software (QSR 2017). This allowed the volume of textual data to be organised and condensed without losing the depth and breadth of information available for subsequent analysis. NVivo and other similar CAQDAS programmes are valuable research tools in assisting the coding process, but they do not replace the intellectual effort and engagement required by the researcher in interpreting and finding meaning in the data (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). NVivo facilitated the process of organising the data by enabling the identification, assignation and grouping of codes, which in turn allowed the researcher to synthesise the information more readily.

7.5.1 Coding approach

Coding as a means of categorising and organising clusters of data is an important analytical step through which meaning is assigned to descriptive or inferred information (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014). Codes can be applied to single words and phrases or to longer paragraphs, and are used to interpret and attach significance to the raw data (Boyatzis 1998). Coding is the most critical step in qualitative data analysis, as all other processes hinge on the effectiveness of this intellectual process which demands deep connection with the data and engagement with the ideas and language used by

participants, as well as interpretation and reflection on the meanings and significance of concepts both described and inferred (Ryan and Bernard 2003).

As an interpretive process employed by the researcher, coding can be approached from two perspectives: deductive or inductive. Deductive coding is driven by theory, as codes are identified *a priori* to meet the needs of the research question and underpinning theoretical perspectives. Coding is then applied to the raw data when these themes are present, and themes which are not already contained in the coding structure are not captured. Inductive or open coding is data-driven, in that themes emerge from the data and the codes are created *a posteriori* following the identification of a significant idea or concept (Braun and Clarke 2006). Data-driven coding is open to the full range of ideas and phenomena contained in the raw data and is highly sensitive to the context in which the data is collected (Boyatzis 1998).

The starting point for coding in this study was the data-driven approach, using open coding at the outset to discover patterns, themes and meanings emerging from the data. This is consistent with the data collection approach outlined in section 7.3 above, which gave primacy to the voices of the participants and prioritises their perspectives. Once the full range of codes had emerged from the raw data, the resultant coding structure was then used in a more deductive fashion as part of a confirmatory process to ensure that the codes were applied consistently and systematically across all the interview transcripts, as recommended by Patton (2002).

7.5.2 Coding process

The process of data collection, transcription and coding are frequently presented as defined stages, implying a linear approach, with one stage commencing following the completion of the previous stage. An alternative approach views coding as an ongoing, iterative and emergent process: Each piece of research data is transcribed and then coded as soon as it has been collected, so that the process cycles between collection, transcription and coding, and the coding structure develops alongside the data collection (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014). This is the approach adopted in this current research, as it allowed deeper engagement with the data at an earlier stage and informed the monitoring of data collection for indicators of saturation.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews produced focused conversations such that the full transcripts could be usefully coded in their entirety. A methodical and disciplined approach was used to develop a coherent code structure, in which each code used is clearly described and assigned an appropriate label, such that consistency in its use can be assured (Boyatzis 1998). Adopting an interpretivist perspective, the language of the research participants was used to drive the labelling of codes such that the nuances of meaning could be seen in the coding structure. Detailed descriptions of the purpose of each code were noted to assist subsequent use and ensure appropriate identification of occurrences in the data. In some instances concepts could be seen as very similar, but two codes were maintained to enable meanings to be differentiated if required. An example is the distinction between the label 'liking', referring to a working relationship in which the participant liked the service provider on a personal level, and the label 'friendship' which is similar but refers to a longer-term and closer personal relationship.

In line with qualitative research accepted practices (see for example, Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014; Patton 2002), the coding structure used in this research was developed in three distinct stages:

(i) First, an open, data-driven, inductive coding approach was used to generate basic level codes from all the raw data from all three research sites, transcript-by-transcript.

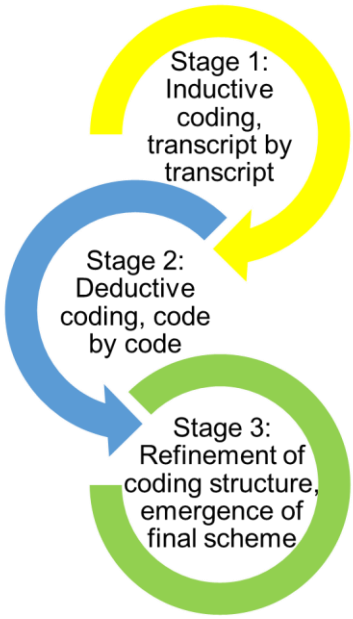
(ii) Second, once all the data had been coded fully and exhaustively, a second review of the raw data was undertaken code-by-code, to ensure that all instances relating to that code had been identified in the full data-set. This was particularly important where codes had emerged from later transcripts such that they had not been available for use with earlier ones. This second stage used a deductive approach to ensure that all data had been reviewed against all possible codes, and provided a quality control mechanism whilst still at a basic coding level. Synonyms for each code were also searched to ensure all possible instances of a concept were identified.

(iii) The third stage of coding entailed the organisation and refinement of the coding structure itself, reviewing relationships between concepts, checking for redundant codes and ensuring a coherent and consistent coding scheme, following the approach of Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006). At this stage

codes which overlapped conceptually were merged if the differentiation was no longer required, such as in the merging of ‘failure’ with ‘errors’, and ‘personal connection’ with ‘knowing someone’.

Figure 7.4 illustrates these three stages and how the coding process was applied to the research data.

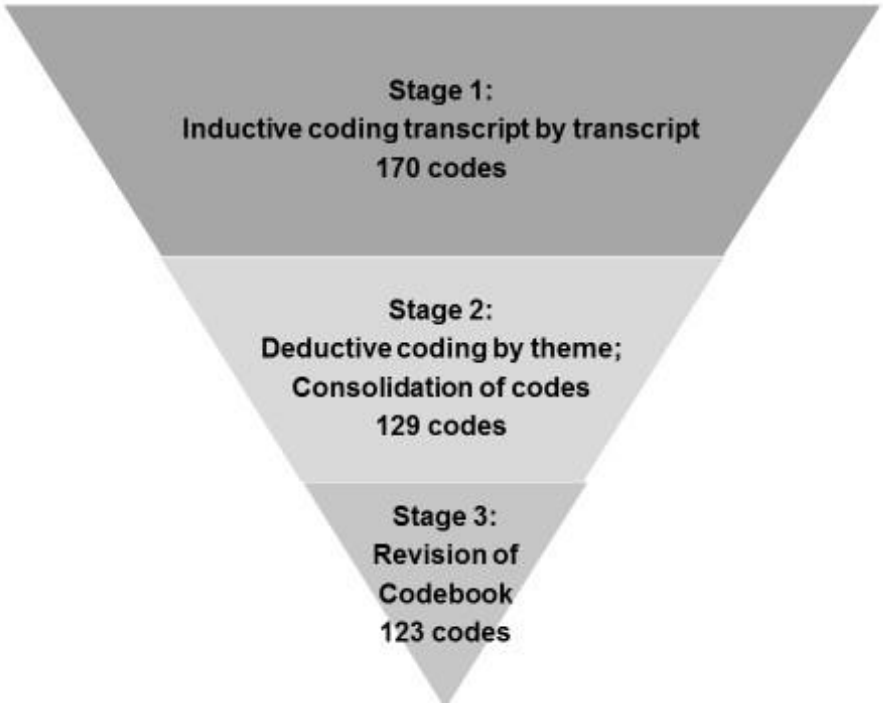
Figure 7.4: The three-stage coding process



(Source: Author)

The use of the three-stage coding process ensured that all transcripts were reviewed thoroughly, and from two perspectives: inductive and deductive. This also ensured that any inconsistencies, duplications and overlaps were identified and eliminated, and that the precise application of each code could be clarified through updated descriptions and coding scheme revisions. At the end of the first stage, 170 codes had been created from the raw data. Following the second review of the data code-by-code, the number of codes was reduced to 129 through consolidation and elimination of duplication. The final revision of the codebook contained 123 codes. Figure 7.5 charts this process.

Figure 7.5: Coding process and refinement of coding scheme



(Source: Author)

Throughout the inductive phase of the coding process, the frequency with which new codes were created was monitored in order to gauge the extent of thematic saturation. The coding was completed in three tranches, corresponding to each site. The majority of the codes emerged from the first tranche, during coding of transcripts from Site C participants. In coding transcripts from Site B a further 19 codes were created, and only 8 new codes were generated with the Site A tranche. In this last tranche, half of all transcripts coded yielded no new codes, and therefore thematic saturation was deemed to have been reached.

7.5.3 Coding scheme

A loose, organising structure which mapped onto the conceptual framework facilitated the interpretation of the data produced from the interview transcripts. Mindful that the imposition of an intellectual framework at too early a stage could restrict the generation of meaningful results (Boyatzis 1998), the structure was monitored throughout the coding process. There were no instances where data could not be accommodated within this structure and therefore it provided a framework sufficiently broad to allow themes and patterns to surface without constraint and to accommodate emerging codes.

Five main headings provided the outline structure for the coding scheme:

1. Organisational context
2. Service context
3. Social context
4. Service quality
5. Relationship quality

With the first three headings capturing the contextual data, the two key headings were service quality and relationship quality. Each of these were broken down further to allow distinctions to be made when participants were referring to their expectations, experiences or outcomes. As required by the data, a concept could be coded both as an expectation and as an experience, to enable detailed understanding of the interplay of expectations, experience and outcomes in the service exchange relationship. For instance, the notion of respect is captured both as an experience and an outcome of relationship quality. Codes were also used to differentiate between positive and negative comments by participants, to avoid confusion and to allow data to be interpreted at a more granular level. An example is the concept of 'shared goals', and instances where these were identified as a positive feature of the relationship were coded separately from those where participants noted the lack of shared goals as an issue. The full coding scheme is shown in Appendix 9, with detailed descriptions of each term used.

7.5.4 Data analysis strategy

A data analysis strategy was drawn up to enable full interrogation of all the data collected and to ensure that the results yielded would provide information relevant to the research questions posed. The schedule for analysis is shown in Table 7.3, listing 21 areas where detailed analysis was undertaken. The research data collected was interrogated as a full data set and also by each variable collected, to allow differences, similarities and anomalies to be identified in the findings. The only exception was the data for 'future use' of services, where all 50 participants reported that their experiences would influence their future use of services, and therefore detailed analysis by variables was not necessary or appropriate given the number of cases involved and the nature of the topic. The data for 'services used' and 'service areas cited' provided contextual information against which participant experiences could be understood, but were not in themselves the focus of the research. These elements were therefore analysed by the high level variables of site and staff type, but not by all variables available as this level of detail was not required for these topics.

Table 7.3: Data Analysis Schedule

	All	*By variables*												
Analysis	Full data set	Site A	Site B	Site C	Academic	Non-academic	Field / discipline	Job role	Gender	Age	Ethni-city	Time in role	Length of service	Prior experience
1. Services used	x	x	x	x	x	x	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2. General view of professional services	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3. Service quality expectations	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
4. Relationship quality expectations	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
5. Positive experiences: service areas cited	x	x	x	x	x	x	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
6. Positive experiences: service characteristics	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
7. Positive experiences: relationship characteristics	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
8. Positive experiences: future use	x	x	x	x	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
9. Negative experiences: service areas cited	x	x	x	x	x	x	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
10. Negative experiences: service characteristics	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
11. Negative experiences: relationship	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
12. Negative experiences: future use	x	x	x	x	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
13. Overall experience codes (RQ&SQ)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
14. What makes the difference between +ve and -ve relationships?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
15. Outcomes overall (RQ&SQ codes)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
16. Outcomes: benefits of +ve relationships	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
17. Outcomes: consequences of -ve relationships	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
18. Gap analysis re expectations v experience	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
19. Org context	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
20. Service context	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
21. Social context	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

The analytical functionality within the NVivo CAQDAS software package (QSR 2017) was deployed to assist in the interrogation of research data, including coding queries, visualisation tools and framework matrices. Each of the 50 'cases' were entered into the software programme using the case classification function, allowing sample characteristics to be identified. Matrix coding queries were used to analyse these case variables, and data was exported into Excel spreadsheets for further scrutiny. Care was taken to ensure that the richness and meaning of the data was not lost through the analytical process by continuously linking back to the qualitative data which was feeding the analysis, and identifying illustrative quotations to avoid becoming overly focused on the numerical data of coding frequency.

NVivo allowed coding frequency to be measured by the number of cases coded to a particular concept, or by the number of references coded to it. Care was taken to take this subtle but important difference into account, by noting which count was being used in the interrogation of the data. For example, there would be a difference in what the data indicated if one person had mentioned trust 50 times compared to if 50 people had mentioned trust once. In identifying key themes, coding frequency was a major factor in recognising the most prominent themes discussed by participants, following the logic that the more a concept occurs in the data the more likely it is to be a theme (Ryan and Bernard 2003; Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault 2015; Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014). This indicator was used in conjunction with review of the qualitative data in order to sense-check the quantitative approach facilitated by the CAQDAS software.

7.5.5 Thematic analysis

Following the collection, coding and analysis of the qualitative data as outlined above, the analysis of themes could commence on the basis of these foundations. A flexible research method, thematic analysis was used in this study as an inductive tool such that a thematic framework emerged and evolved from the raw data, via data-driven coding. As noted in relation to coding, the process of finding patterns and meanings in the data is recursive and not linear (Braun and Clarke 2006), and will rely heavily on the researcher's judgement in identifying themes and attributing significance (Ryan and Bernard 2003).

A number of scholars have published detailed descriptions and step-by-step guides to undertaking thematic analysis (e.g. Spencer et al. 2003; Boyatzis 1998). The approach

adopted in this study most closely followed that proposed by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014), using matrices to undertake cross-case analysis, to facilitate systematic analysis of variables and to identify significant findings. Interrelationships between concepts and ideas are the foundation for explanation of phenomena, and therefore analysing data using a matrix approach enables patterns and significance to be discerned (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014: 224). An understanding of the hierarchies and relationships between concepts is also afforded by organising themes by level or stage. This approach allowed themes to emerge across the dataset when they had been coded as an expectation, experience or outcome, but also to identify the interplay between these concepts during the service exchange and the influence of interpersonal and organisational factors on the exchange relationship. Extracts from a selection of matrices used can be found in Appendix 10.

Themes were identified through scrutiny of the coding scheme, and emerged from a consideration of both prevalence in the data (Ryan and Bernard 2003; Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault 2015; Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014; Patton 2002) as well as magnitude or significance of the phenomenon (Attride-Stirling 2001; Boyatzis 1998; Ritchie and Lewis 2003; Marshall and Rossman 1995). For example, during the interviews participants identified circumstances and characteristics of both productive and unproductive working relationships and were asked to describe the effect that their experiences had on their own work. Impact on efficiency levels emerged as a clear theme as it was cited in most responses. Financial loss as a direct result of service experience was identified by fewer participants, but this was also captured as a theme because of the magnitude of the effect on the customer's outcomes. Researcher judgement was therefore used in identifying significant themes for further analysis and interpretation based on these dual criteria. However, it is important to note that the magnitude of the effect was assessed by the researcher from the perspective of the participant and the weight that they ascribed to it during the conversation, taking the cue from the language used and their description of the phenomenon. This is consistent with the interpretive research approach adopted for this study.

Chapter summary

This chapter has set out in full the data collection methods and analytical approaches used in order to yield evidence in response to the research questions posed. The presentation of sample characteristic data enables the backgrounds of the participants

to be taken into account in understanding the findings from the research. By stating the approaches used, decisions made and parameters employed, this chapter allows this research to be more closely scrutinised and to meet the demands for rigour, transparency and credibility. The next chapters in the concluding Part 3 of the thesis present the findings of the research achieved through these approaches.

PART THREE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The final part of this thesis presents the findings of the empirical research following extensive data analysis, accompanied by discussion of salient themes and implications for internal service provision in universities. Chapter 8 provides an overview of the research data which informs the discussion in Chapters 9, 10 and 11 under headings relating to the research questions which have guided this study. Chapter 12 concludes this part with an evaluation of the relevance of the findings for the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 5 and the underpinning theory from which it derives.

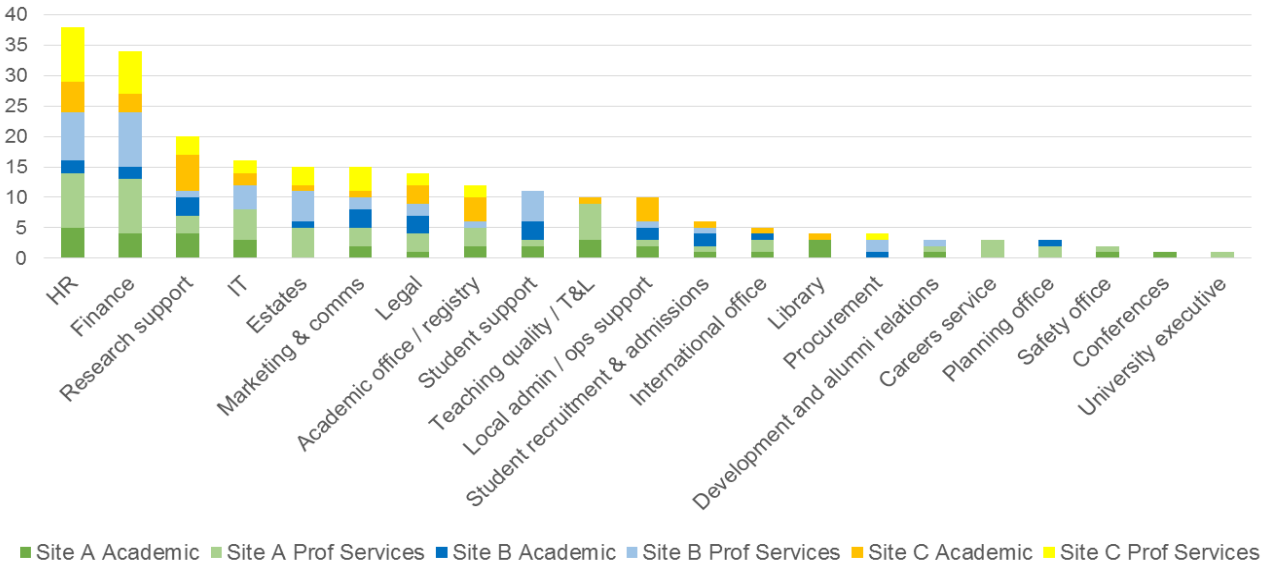
CHAPTER 8: OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

This chapter provides an overview of the empirical research findings as an introduction to the subsequent Chapters 9 to 12, which examine how the findings specifically address each research question. This chapter therefore sets the scene for the more detailed discussions which follow, and presents the findings according to the three stages of the service exchange: Expectations, experience and outcomes.

Themes which emerged through the coding of the interview data were examined through matrix analysis to enable connections to be made between concepts and to allow comparison between examples provided by participants which were cited as positive or negative experiences. Interview data was analysed by taking each element of the conceptual framework in turn, reflecting the flow of the conversations with participants and mapping data across the elements of service exchange relationship cycle outlined in the model: Expectations, experience and outcomes. The findings were then reviewed through the lenses of service quality and relationship quality, and the influence of contextual factors and case variables were also examined, allowing a full picture of the internal service ecosystem as experienced by the research participants in this study.

To position these findings, Figure 8.1 shows the professional support services which were identified by participants as their main sources of support.

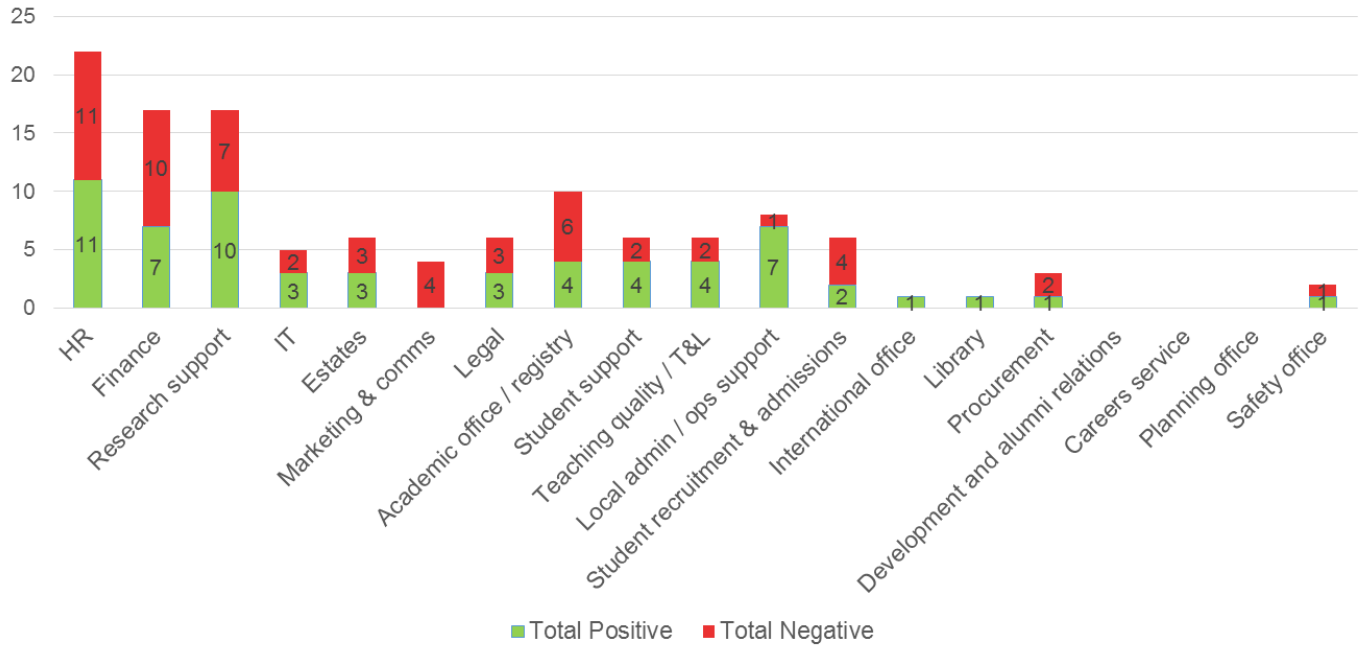
Figure 8.1: Services used by participants



The services most frequently referred to were Human Resources (HR) and finance support functions, followed by research support, Information Technology (IT) support, estates, marketing and legal services.

Participants were asked to describe their experiences of positive and productive working relationships, as well as those which were less than positive. In reviewing which services were cited and comparing between those mentioned favourably and those less so, there is a close correlation between the frequency of service use and the frequency of them being mentioned in either category: Those which were used more and were important to participants are those which were mentioned in more examples. Figure 8.2 shows the results for the full dataset.

Figure 8.2: Services cited in positive and negative relationship experiences



This finding was surprising, as it might have been expected that certain types of service would suffer from more negative views than others because they can be viewed as constraining, such as procurement or legal functions which enforce compliance to financial or legal rules, whilst others enjoy predominantly positive perceptions because they are predominantly 'enabling services', such as the library or research support. However, for the four most frequently cited services (HR, finance, research support and academic office / registry), the split between positive and negative views was fairly even.

Services which were notably positively viewed were local support services, whilst services which were notably negatively viewed included marketing and student recruitment.

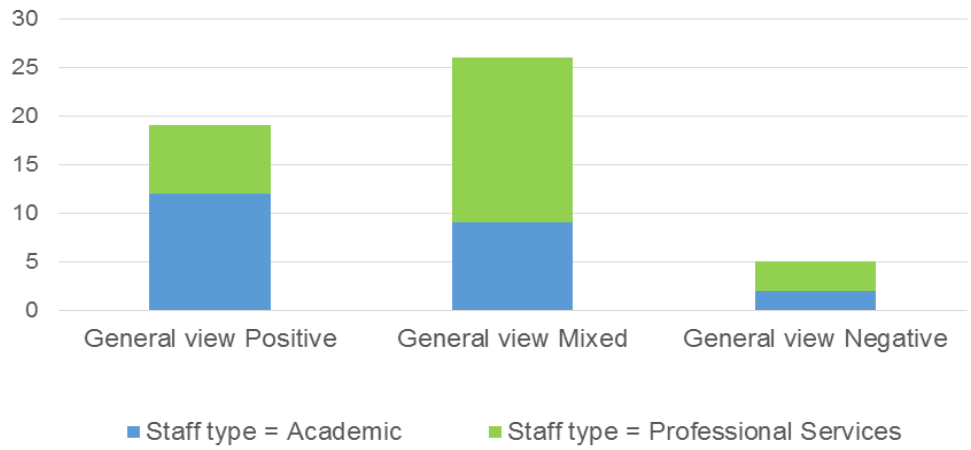
8.1 General view of professional services

At the start of each interview, each participant was asked to give their general view of the quality of professional support services at their institution, in order to ascertain their prior perceptions and general expectations. These views are presented below in Figure 8.3. Views were mixed (26 out of 50 responses), in that there was seen to be large variations between services across campus, or positive (19 responses), with only five participants at Site C taking a predominantly negative view.

Figure 8.3: General view of professional service quality by site

This data shows that positive perceptions significantly outweigh negative perceptions, but that experiences are variable across services and across campus. The data was then reviewed by staff type to see if academic staff views differed from those of professional services staff in their overall assessment of professional service quality. Figure 8.4 shows that twice as many academic staff participants were positive in their appraisal than professional services staff were, and that professional services staff were primarily of a mixed view. Given the descriptions of tensions between academic and support staff in the HE literature (Dobson and Conway 2003; Kolsaker 2014), this finding was contrary to expectations and may indicate a maturing of these relationships in practice as intimated by Gray (2015).

Figure 8.4: General view of professional service quality by staff type



Positive views referred to the professionalism, specialist expertise and critical support provided by professional service colleagues, recognising their own dependence on these support services. Participants who viewed service quality as mixed described situations where some services delivered strongly whilst others struggled to meet expectations and where individuals were well-regarded but their service was seen to be extremely stretched. The nature of the individual relationship was often viewed as a determining factor in how the service as a whole was performing:

> *I think it's really difficult to generalise, I think in some areas it's great, and I don't know what I'd do without some of these services, and in other areas I find it inordinately frustrating (Site B, Academic).*

> *Variable I would say, and a lot of it depends on the individual who you are working with. So over the years, because I've worked with a number of different HR business partners over the years, and I've worked with a number of different finance business partners and a number of different people centrally in a number of different areas, and it almost entirely depends on who you got, and building a personal relationship, or a working relationship with those people, and that's easier with some people than others (Site B, Professional Services).*

Even when negative views were expressed, participants appreciated that in some cases individuals were working in difficult circumstances:

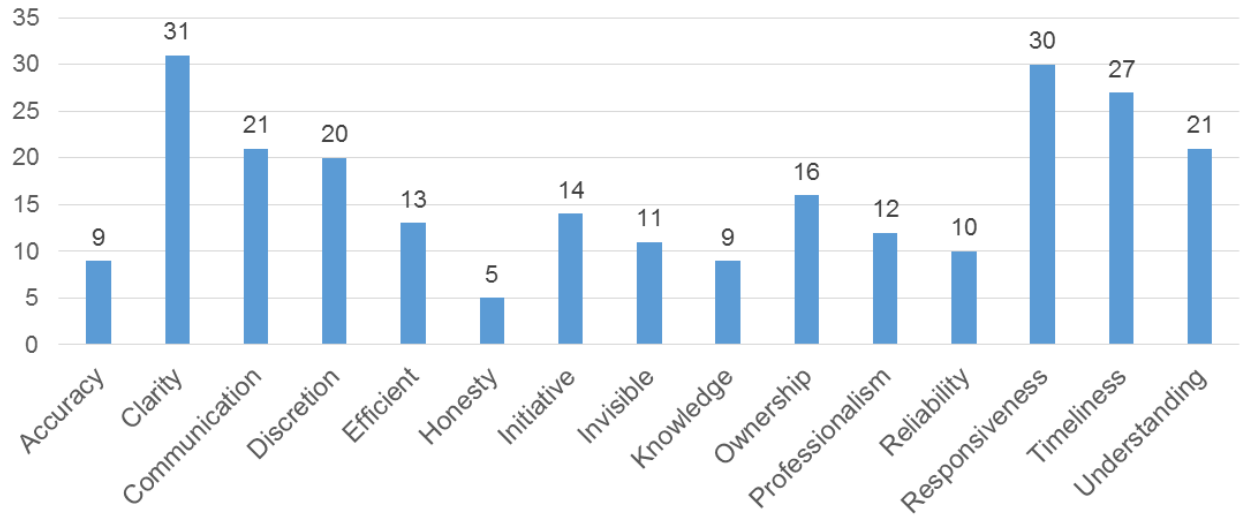
> *Disjointed. If you asked me to summarise in one word – disjointed. Fragmented, inconsistent. I think people mean very well and want to provide a good service, but I think to a certain extent hands are tied*

by the lack of internal process or the lack of a mature internal process (Site C, Professional Services).

8.2 Service expectations

Participant responses about their expectations of service providers focused on service characteristics, with only limited references to features relating to relationship quality. However, expectations hinged on the actions and responses of individuals delivering those services, rather than the service provision itself, indicating the potential for individuals to influence the service experience in the light of such expectations. Figure 8.5 shows the spread of responses for participant expectations of their professional service colleagues for concepts identified through data analysis.

Figure 8.5: Service quality expectations: cases coded



Participants who identified clarity as an expectation wanted to be able to understand what they could reasonably expect from a service in terms of delivery and timescales, as well as be clear who to approach for help. Issues of institutional complexity, frequent service model changes and staff turnover compounded this need to understand what could be expected, as participants expressed frustration in not knowing the scope of a service, how to engage with it or what each person's remit was. This was particularly evident for Site B participants where there have been significant changes to support structures across the university.

I have to admit I have no idea who I need to speak to. There was a recent case where I was trying to sort something out … and I just

> *couldn't work out who to contact so eventually I just kept phoning the office, just kept phoning random numbers until someone picked the phone up (Site B, Academic).*
>
> *I don't know who to contact because I can't remember the email addresses and which one is supposed to be used for what because they are not even obvious what they mean (Site B, Academic).*

Once they had engaged with a service, participants wanted to be kept informed as to progress of their enquiry, and to have their expectations actively managed so that they could in turn manage their own workload or other dependencies. Some participants also noted that clarity on service standards helped them to modify their own behaviours, as they were then able to make judgements about what it was reasonable to expect of a service, and to avoid making unreasonable demands where they valued their relationships with colleagues. Effective and regular communication was also cited as a key expectation, as the means by which clear service standards could be understood, and as a feature of an ongoing service interaction through which expectations could be managed and customer service levels demonstrated:

> *I wouldn't be happy if my utility provider didn't respond to my query in over a month and didn't give me further information, so why should I put up with that as an internal customer in the university? (Site C, Professional Services).*
>
> *If I'm leaping up and down asking for help I expect someone to get back to me and I expect someone to say something useful (Site A, Academic).*

This finding is consistent with the works of Mohr and Spekman (1994) and Morgan and Hunt (1994) which emphasise the importance of effective communication for the development of collaborative and trusted relationships.

Responsiveness and timeliness are closely related and emerged from the data as key service expectations. Responsiveness refers to the time taken to respond to a service request and the need for timescales to be respected, as well as to the ability of services to respond appropriately to the customer's specific needs. Participants expected a 'can-do' approach which recognised their needs as customers in a fast-paced, constantly changing environment, in which services were able to adapt and be flexible and pragmatic in meeting their changing needs:

> *Responsiveness – that's my number one. So not having to chase things, getting the reply quickly, and a carefully thought through and*

> *informed response, good advice, detailed, measured advice is what I'm looking for. So I don't want somebody just to reply dead quickly, I want it to be the right answer. But I do want it in a timely way (Site B, Professional Services).*
>
> *And the other thing I think its words like flexibility, listening, understanding my objective and then working to deliver that objective (Site C, Professional Services).*

On timeliness, participants expected service providers to have an appreciation of the timescales and deadlines that their customers were working to, and that sometimes these were outside their control, such as funding deadlines. They also identified an added pressure in that often they were managing expectations of external customers themselves, and so timeliness was doubly important.

Service quality was expected to be higher when providers had a good understanding of their customers' needs, contexts, pressures and priorities. Participants whose roles were based in academic departments felt that professional service colleagues who had direct experience of working in an academic department were more effective service providers as a result, and that others should take active steps to access such levels of understanding. As with the expectation of clarity, participants also felt that both parties benefitted from having an understanding of each other's work and pressures in order to work more effectively together:

> *I'd like us both to have a better understanding of what we both do, so what the school priorities are, what the school imperatives are and what our strategy is, and then actually what do they need from us for them to do their job well, what do they need from us so that they can help us (Site B, Professional Services).*

Expectations around the use of discretion follow from an understanding of the customer and their needs, especially in the complex working environment of a university, and this finding is explored further in Chapter 10. Participants were dismissive of 'one-size-fits-all' approaches and service provision which had not consulted with customers or did not take their particular needs into account in service design and delivery:

> *I think it's about listening to your customer. I think there's quite a lot of telling people what they're going to do for people, but it may not be what I need or what is going to help me (Site C, Professional Services).*

Once service providers understood their customers' needs, they were then expected to be able to adapt their provision, be flexible in how the support was provided, and to use their discretion in how policies or regulations were interpreted and applied to particular circumstances and situations:

> *We all appreciate that there are systems and processes in the university which have to be in place, of course they do. But sometimes you don't want to break them but you need to flex them a little bit because life is like that (Site C, Professional Services).*

Participants recognised that rules and procedures are important to the effective functioning of a university, but that a 'computer says no' attitude could be damaging and unhelpful in supporting staff to achieve their objectives. Rather, discretion was seen as an enabling mind-set, applying 'human intelligence' to the situation, and was particularly expected to be used in 'grey areas' and in special cases where the correct response was a matter of judgement:

> *When there are rules and hard and fast rules then I need to know what they are, but it's "how can we do what you need to do" rather than "no, you can't do it" (Site B, Professional Services).*

Participants' expectations of their professional service colleagues were used as reference points to determine whether a service exchange was perceived to be satisfactory, confirming that customer perceptions drive their evaluation of service quality (Cronin and Taylor 1992; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985). Where participants identified service characteristics which they looked for in service interactions, these were subsequently referred to when they related their service experiences, and informed their selection of examples of positive and negative service exchange relationships.

Prominent characteristics of service expectations – responsiveness, understanding, communication – echo the findings of Reynoso and Moores (1995), but other characteristics which emerged as significant provide additional dimensions not identified in this earlier research, such as clarity, discretion and ownership. These dimensions may testify to the complexities of internal service in a university setting, as these are all factors which have the potential to help individuals to manage in complex and bureaucratic structures.

8.3 Positive service experiences

Positive service experiences were characterised by descriptions of the competence, reliability, initiative and professionalism demonstrated by professional services staff, coupled with strong 'soft' skills such as communication, responsiveness, ownership and adaptability to the needs of the customer. In describing such positive encounters, participants frequently spoke in emotive terms about the value such positive relationships provided, describing working relationships which provided succour and moral support as well as practical solutions to challenges faced, such as in this case:

> *It gives you a very positive mind-set, I think, when you come into work you know it's going to be an enabling atmosphere, and you know that whatever is thrown at you, there will be people who will apply their considerable intelligence to finding a fix (Site A, Professional Services).*

Where experiences of services provided by professional support staff were particularly positive, participants recounted examples which illustrated the complementarity of academic and professional services staff skill-sets and expertise, with better outcomes delivered as a result of such collaboration:

> *Having somebody who has got expertise in areas that I don't, that's the biggest thing I value (Site B, Professional Services).*

Collaborative working was seen to deliver process efficiencies and 'short-cuts' through the application of specialist skills and know-how, illustrating the concept of exchange efficiency (Palmatier 2008). For example, the ability of professional services staff to navigate internal organisational complexities, interdependencies, policies and bureaucracy on behalf of their academic customers was especially appreciated:

> *I really like having single points of contact who can navigate, take your issue and get the solution and offer up that solution on a plate (Site A, Professional Services).*

They were also valued for their institutional memory and network of personal and professional contacts:

> *She is really knowledgeable about the university, she has her contacts, fixes things and is proactive (Site C, Academic).*

Where professional service colleagues were appreciated for using their initiative, participants frequently referred to a sense of 'added-value' in that issues could be

anticipated, and preventative or mitigating actions put in place to avoid further problems, as in this example:

> *I really value when people use their initiative. So the person I work with closely around the ethics will spot problems, will raise them, will say 'we need to change the way we do things because of that', will pre-empt what I might need for a meeting (Site B, Academic).*

References to initiative and problem-solving behaviours also relate to the expectations of discretion and the use of intelligent, expert judgement in difficult or sensitive situations, especially where the interests of an external customer such as a student were compromised by an institutional approach. This finding echoes the work of Gwinner et al. (2005) and Karlsson (2019) in making a connection between the use of discretion and the positive effect on service quality outcomes, and the work of Perrone, Zaheer and McEvily (2003) that linked job autonomy and the use of discretion with customer commitment to the exchange relationship.

Responsiveness unsurprisingly emerged as another key factor in a positive assessment of service quality, tying in with the expectation of responsiveness as outlined above. Reliability was also rated highly, and participants talked about feeling more confident in their own roles and more able to trust the service as a result of having reliable colleagues who would deliver the support they said they would:

> *And with really positive working relationships I can be safe in the knowledge I can give people jobs to do and I know they're going to do them without me chasing them, and that they're going to come back to me at the point that they need more information or at the point that they've completed it (Site C, Professional Services).*

The sense of a common purpose, mutual understanding and shared ownership of problems were frequently at the heart of co-operative relationships described by participants, and the motivations of service providers to support their colleagues were assessed by their customers in those terms. The findings therefore provide strong empirical support for prior research which emphasises these factors as antecedents of co-operation (e.g. Palmatier et al. 2006; Ferrin, Bligh and Kohles 2008). Where alignment was perceived, a high level of trust emerged, and this underpinned future service exchanges and the development of effective collaborations, as illustrated in this quote:

Being on the same page, that's what makes the difference. Understanding that we're all heading in the same direction, albeit from slightly different quarters, and it's getting that mutual understanding of what we're trying to achieve together, as opposed to what I want and what you want, and we're going to go in opposite directions (Site B, Professional Services).

In positive service exchange examples, factors relating to interpersonal relationships were cited much more frequently than factors relating to service quality, indicating that once a reasonable standard of service has been achieved, the relationship quality is what makes the difference in perceptions of service exchange quality.

8.4 Negative service experiences

In service exchange relationships which were not deemed positive by participants, the overriding characterisation of these experiences was of frustration and time wasted. Participants were frustrated and annoyed that services did not meet their needs when that is what they are designed to do, and doubly frustrated when they were not permitted to seek support elsewhere when internal services were failing. Academic staff in particular noted the existence of a central service charge which was levied on their departments but which was seen to be wasted on services which did not deliver the support needed, compounding frustration with a sense of poor value for money:

You start then to question why are we paying the amount of central service charges we pay (Site A, Academic).

You feel like you pay for these services and it shouldn't have to be me having to keep badgering them (Site B, Academic).

The academics, they know about central service charges, they know we pay all this money out, they know that we get beaten with a stick constantly about being in deficit, but the reason that we're in deficit is because of those massive central service charges. And then when you get such poor service and such frustrating interactions, they are like 'why are we paying all this money out?' (Site A, Professional Services).

Academic staff felt the frustration and time wasted keenly because of the other pressures on their time:

I think that's where academics in particular get especially frustrated is – and I know we're guilty of this too as professional staff have other things to do as well – but the pressures on us around research and

> *getting marking done and seeing the queue of students who are outside your office door, if suddenly you lose a day to something mundane that someone in professional services really could have dealt with, that's very stressful and makes you frustrated and angry (Site A, Academic).*

Not only did participants not obtain the support service they needed, but they spent time and effort dealing with the situation for which help was needed. The combination of frustration and time wasted had significant implications for individuals' own effectiveness and performance, which could go beyond the original customer and provider relationship:

> *This is something that I'm dealing with, and I appear to be dealing with it for several hours a day every day and have been for weeks, so in terms of my time, and it's not just me, it's other members of my staff, we're spending inordinate amounts of time trying to get some support from them (Site B, Academic).*

As with positive experiences, ownership was highlighted as a factor, and this theme is also covered in more detail in Chapter 10. In more negative cases, it was the absence of ownership which caused problems. Participants frequently used the phrase 'passing the buck' or felt that they as customers were being 'passed from pillar to post', with no-one taking responsibility for resolving the issue for fear of being implicated or blamed:

> *It's a blame game rather than somebody taking ownership and fixing the problems (Site A, Professional Services).*

Such experiences exacerbated feelings of frustration through a sense that the service provider just did not care about the customer's needs and was not engaged sufficiently to work towards a solution. When probed more deeply about the roots of such experiences, participants noted capacity issues with service providers, tensions between departments or staff groups, a lack of empowerment of support staff, and the existence of competing priorities and agendas. Such factors are not conducive to positive working relationships, and the research data provides detailed evidence of this. Participants cited competence as a factor in more negative service experiences, focusing on errors and lack of skill or attention to detail. The third comment in the set below additionally highlights the cumulative effects of poor service quality:

> *Some of my staff weren't paid correctly for six months in a row, and I really had to then say 'lovely though you are, I've had enough now' (Site C, Professional Services).*

So filling all the forms in, passing them on to colleagues in Marketing, and then seeing something on the website which is not what you wrote. And you get 'oh we've just copied and pasted it from something else', it just drives you bonkers! (Site A, Academic).

If there are problems with timetabling it just pulls everything down – the staff get cross, the students get cross, you get bad evaluations, and everything just follows from that (Site C, Academic).

Service providers were seen to lack understanding of the implications of mistakes they made, and this was compounded by their unwillingness to take responsibility for such problems.

The lack of appreciation of the customer's needs and absence of understanding of the local context were also identified as problematic when encountering institutional rules and regulations. In contrast to the positive relationship examples where discretion and initiative were employed by service providers to good effect, the lack of flexibility and the blind application of rules were seen as evidence of a more negative service relationship, again leading to frustration and tension:

It's the human stupidity, the lack of flexibility, the lack of understanding and unwillingness to reconsider (Site C, Academic).

With finance it's very much "the computer says no" and there's no human aspect. They don't care about what they've done to the other bits of the business. They've followed a policy and your voice means nothing (Site C, Professional Services).

They talk about rules, regulations and so on and there's no willingness to really understand, to really listen, it's the rule book that's thrown at you (Site C, Academic).

Whilst each of these comments pinpoint a different aspect of this issue, a common underlying theme is the lack of understanding of the effects of these rigid approaches. Academic participants, and especially those in leadership roles such as heads of school or department, were particularly exercised about the application of regulations and policies. These participants cited tensions between academic and professional services staff, and were most troubled when the needs of students were seen to be compromised as an unintended consequence:

They've got a set of rules to apply, and sometimes they will apply those in a sort of mechanistic way, not seeing the context always (Site A, Professional Services).

I know there has to be some sort of rules, but why not work around some of the issues to get a solution that works for everybody? (Site C, Academic).

Underlying issues of power and control can be identified in some of these cases, especially when these had shifted in the recent past, such as through greater centralisation as in the second of these comments:

There seems to be a growing move towards an assumption that one size can fit all when it simply doesn't (Site A, Professional Services).

The difficulty is I think because they've centralised all those services, that you don't have that complete control over your staff, basically (Site C, Academic).

These findings resonate with the view that the use of control measures can undermine interpersonal trust and hinder the development of trusting relationships between individuals and across departments within an organisation (Das and Teng 2001; Malhotra and Murnighan 2002).

8.5 What makes the difference?

Participants were asked their views as to what factors in their experience made the difference between relationships with professional service colleagues which were predominantly positive and productive, and those which were not. Most frequently cited was personal connection, confirming that interpersonal relationships do influence perceptions of service quality:

To work properly you do have to know people as a person, not just as a string of characters on a screen (Site A, Academic).

If you've even just a little bit got to know someone then all sorts of things become possible (Site A, Professional Services).

The role of individual personality and the extent to which service providers understood the needs of their colleagues were also mentioned. Shared interests, aligned priorities and engagement with the needs of others were notable factors, along with communication, rapport and trust between colleagues:

If you can talk to them and get to know them, you've met them in a meeting you see how they operate that can help, and you build up more trust (Site B, Academic).

Trust was seen as an enabler which allowed relationships to develop, and trustworthiness was based on evidence of professional competence as well as personal qualities such as integrity and reliability, in line with the theory of Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995), which proposes ability, benevolence and integrity as the basis for judgements on another person's trustworthiness. As proposed by De Jong, Dirks and Gillespie (2016), trust was frequently experienced by participants as a liberating phenomenon in that it freed them from worry, eliminated the need to check up on colleagues' performance, and promoted efficient ways of working as information sharing and communications becomes easier:

> *The trust and confidence that I have in what the individual is saying to me is correct. I've got no hesitations, I don't have to second guess, I don't have to ask the question again (Site A, Professional Services).*

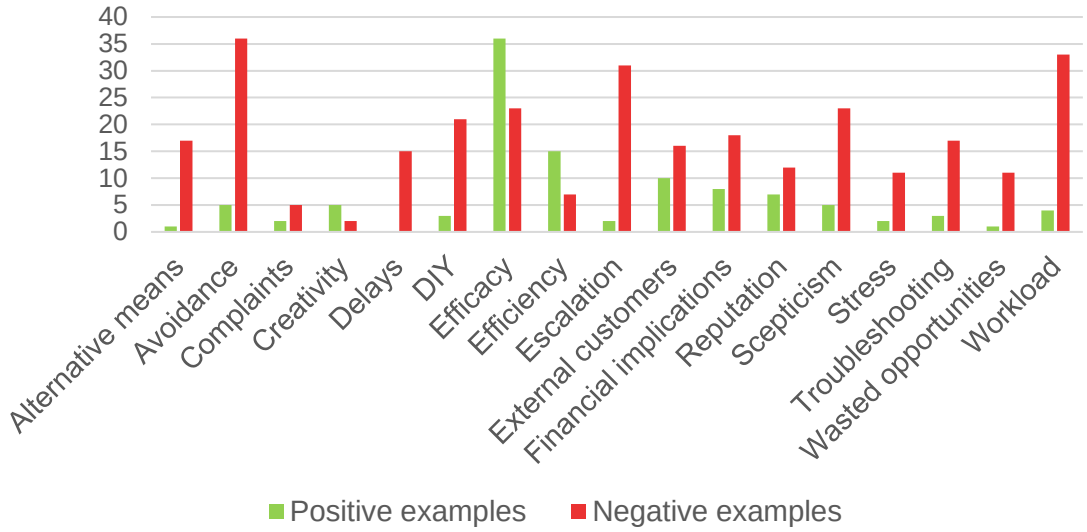
> *That the level of trust is so good that they relieve my anxiety, any anxiety that I might have, so you know you can trust someone to do the job, you know that it's going to be OK. So I think that relieves stress (Site B, Academic).*

Participants did not always distinguish between the service exchange and the working relationship, either because they viewed the relationship in a more holistic way or because they viewed the service exchange in more instrumental terms. However, these findings indicate that the elements of exchange experiences which make most difference to customer perceptions of service quality are those based in the interpersonal relationship.

8.6 Service outcomes

Outcomes of service exchange were encountered at individual and organisational levels, with practical and psychological consequences. Figure 8.6 shows the outcomes of service quality as reported by participants, illustrating the subsequent actions and attitudes adopted following service exchange experiences. The data shows that outcomes are manifested differently, depending on whether the service experience was positively or negatively perceived. In negative examples, the most frequently mentioned outcomes were effects on personal efficacy, increased workload and escalation to senior managers. The most common outcome for positive experiences was efficacy in terms of being better equipped to perform in own job role, supporting earlier findings by Reynoso and Moores (1995) and Schneider and Bowen (2019) that connects internal service quality with external service outcomes.

Figure 8.6: Aspects of service outcomes cited in positive and negative experiences



When experiences were positive, participants reported the benefits for their own work performance and wellbeing, as well as the value this brought in the longer term in enabling greater creativity, improved knowledge and confidence, problem resolution and adaptability, and better collaboration for value co-creation.

When experiences were less positive, the outcomes of these exchange relationships suppressed the potential benefits as well as created significant difficulties for the individual and their department. The psychological consequences of negative emotions such as frustration and anger led to high levels of stress, demoralisation and demotivation, tension between staff groups, increased use of control measures and greater likelihood of resorting to counter-productive behaviours. These measures were designed to protect the individual and their department against risk from service deficiencies, and included avoidance of services and individuals, escalation and complaints, and undertaking support tasks which should have been carried out by professional services staff:

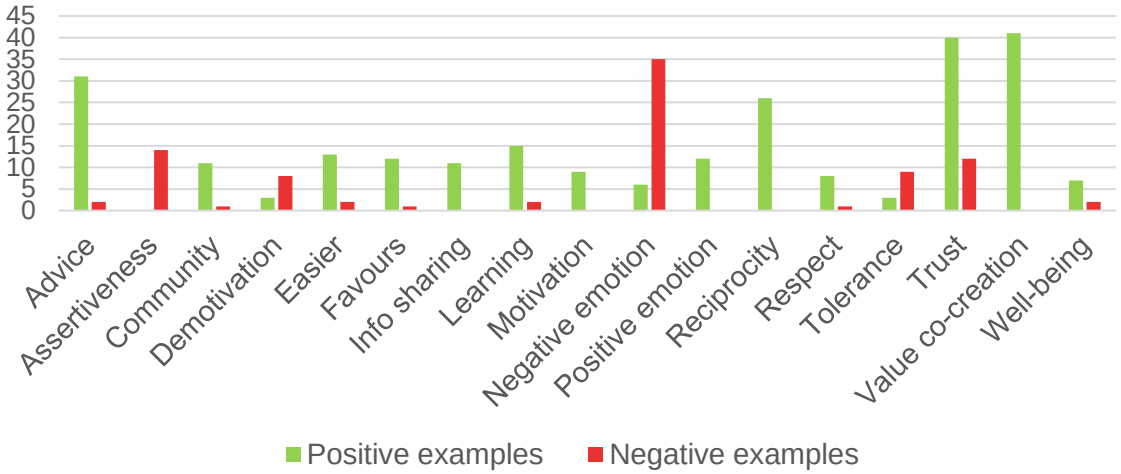
> *There is nothing worse than just feeling grumpy about a service not working, or impacting badly and feeling unempowered (Site B, Academic).*

> *They'd be my last port of call to go to in terms of seeking advice, and when I do go, I'm definitely more curt because I'm expecting to be*

disappointed by whatever they tell me (Site C, Professional Services).

Analysis of the data on service outcomes from the perspective of the interpersonal relationship shown in Figure 8.7 also demonstrates differential effects of positive and negative service experiences.

Figure 8.7: Aspects of relationship outcomes cited in positive and negative experiences



The most frequently occurring relational outcomes were associated with value co-creation, the existence of relationships based on trust, the ability to seek advice and counsel from trusted colleagues, and the development of reciprocal relationships in which favours are requested and granted. In contrast, the most common relational outcome of negative service experiences was negative emotional responses experienced at an individual level. The data also shows that the consequences of negative relationships are experienced not just in the presence of detrimental outcomes, but also in the absence of more positive relational characteristics.

When positive service experiences generated co-operative relationships, these were reinforced through increased opportunities to demonstrate goodwill, trust and commitment, which in turn promoted job satisfaction, employee engagement, motivation and a sense of belonging on the part of the participant, as well as a greater propensity to access the service again in future with confidence:

And you got the feeling that we're part of a team, we're working hard on this, we've all got to put the hours in but we're part of a team (Site C, Professional Services).

> *The culture and the community that those relationships create as a collective makes me feel that I can do that and I really want to do that (Site B, Professional Services).*
>
> *It contributes to a really dynamic working environment. So you have good colleagues, you have a sense of camaraderie, but you know who you can rely on (Site A, Professional Services).*

Participants who had also experienced more strained relationships reflected particularly on the tangible benefits to them of strong relationships in which they did not need to double-check work or chase responses, and the impact of this for their workloads and personal efficacy.

In comparison with the positive relationship outcomes, when relationships are less positive there are reduced opportunities for value co-creation, collaboration, reciprocity and learning, and participants were less motivated, less respectful of their colleagues and lacked a sense of community:

> *I think after a while you just give up and think actually I'll just go elsewhere (Site C, Professional Services).*
>
> *It is stress as well, it makes the job – when those relationships or those customer service experiences aren't good – it makes you think 'what am I doing here?' And that's got career implications as well (Site A, Professional Services).*
>
> *You just spend all your time fire-fighting, and that puts people in a negative frame of mind rather than a positive frame of mind, when according to our metrics we are doing really well (Site C, Academic).*

In the first two of these comments, the effects of poor service point to retention issues and employee commitment to the organisation, such is the disaffection experienced. The data also provides evidence that an exchange relationship need not be actively hostile or difficult in order to have a detrimental impact on the quality of service provision: the absence of a relationship was sufficient to inhibit potential positive outcomes of the exchange.

These positive and negative illustrations of outcomes of service exchange relationships provide empirical evidence to support current theoretical understandings of exchange relationships (Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990; Palmatier et al. 2006; Melamed and Simpson 2016). In particular, these findings establish that whilst many elements of service exchange are common in internal and external service exchange settings, the

experiences and outcomes manifest in different ways as a result of the ongoing, structurally-mandated relationships between colleagues. The findings also confirm the link between internal and external service provision, as participants were able to describe the impact of internal service provision on their ability to serve their own customers, which in many cases were external to the university:

> *But it's time, and the toing and froing, come on! Time could have been better spent on answering more enquiries from other students, right?! (Site B, Academic).*
>
> *It's very different when you're at the front-end, and you can absolutely see the end point is a huge queue of disgruntled students and a load of complaints winging its way in, and you just cannot get the message through, no matter how you say it (Site B, Professional Services).*

The costs of poor relationships and the benefits of stronger ones are examined in greater depth in Chapter 11 below, where these consequences are considered in terms of their impact at individual and institutional levels.

8.7 Data variables

At each stage of the analysis process, data was reviewed by participant variables to ascertain whether any characteristics of the sample set produced variances which had implications for the research findings. The variables which showed the most significant differences in comparison with the full data set were by site and staff type (academic and professional services).

Site

The organisational context was a factor in participants' service exchange experiences. At Site A, participants frequently mentioned the influence of management structures and the tensions between central and local control of service provision as a feature of their working relationships. Site A participants were also more exercised about tensions between academic and professional services staff and the ways in which stereotyping and misalignment of priorities could hinder the development of positive relationships on both sides, echoing the findings of Small (2008). At Site B, the pervasive contextual theme was the challenges and effects of organisational change and upheaval, and staff were of the view that this was a particularly pronounced feature of the institution at the present time. At Site C the area which was of most concern was the existence of functional silos, and the difficulties they created for communication, collaboration and

shared understandings of priorities. The biggest service issue highlighted at Sites A and C was capacity, in that professional services staff were seen to be trying their best but their resources and capacity to deliver were significantly outstripped by the demands of the university. At Site B, the most frequently cited service issue was the service delivery model employed by professional services, and participants especially took exception to the deployment of resource accounts which were seen as faceless and dehumanising.

The findings for service exchange relationship experiences relate closely to these situational findings. For instance, at Site B the participants valued clarity and personal connections more highly than other institutions because they were currently struggling to keep up with service and staff changes, and they no longer knew who to ask for what. They were also more likely to avoid accessing services which they did not rate or to undertake the work themselves because it was easier, adding to their own workloads:

> *That behaviour of people trying to do more themselves, which is in academics anyway, they tend to be quite independent people, they just tend to get on with it. That obviously is quite bad really as you're not making best use of the support around you and probably not doing as good a job as somebody (Site B, Academic).*

At Site A there was a greater proportion of concerns about tension and blame between staff groups, relating to the disconnect between academic and administrative staff and the divisions between central and local services, reflecting the work of Gray (2015). Site C was the only site in which participants reported a negative general view of professional services, and whilst this was partly down to the capacity issues, the other prominent feature of service experiences was the application and interpretation of institutional rules and regulations. This theme meant that Site C participants particularly valued professional services staff who used their discretion, judgement and problem-solving skills to find solutions which met customer needs at the same time as complying or getting around bureaucratic restrictions:

> *Occasionally she can't do what I'm asking for, because there is the law, but she will say 'look we can't do this, we have to do this, but we're going to make it as painless as possible and this is how we're going to do it' (Site C, Professional Services).*
>
> *I can understand why we need to have these rules, and that rules and guidelines can be really helpful, but they're not there to hit people with, and so I think an ability for people to say 'why don't you talk to*

so and so and we'll see if we can do it differently?', would be really helpful (Site C, Academic).

Staff type

The different expectations and role priorities of academic and professional services staff meant that there were some subtle differences in how relationships with professional service colleagues were perceived. Broadly, the themes identified by the two groups were the same, but the emphasis was often slightly different. In terms of general perceptions of service quality, academic staff were surprisingly less harsh in their judgement of their professional service colleagues than professional service staff were, countering the narrative in some earlier works (Dobson 2000; Gray 2015; Wohlmuther 2008). Academic staff also found it much more difficult to describe poor working relationships with professional service individuals than they did for productive relationships, whereas examples seemed to come to mind much more easily for professional service participants. It may be that the professional services staff were more familiar with expected service standards as a result of their own professional experience, and therefore any deficiency in service quality would be more easily identified by this staff group.

In positive service exchange relationships, both staff groups valued the emergence of trusting relationships which provided opportunities for reciprocity, goodwill and value co-creation. Professional services staff additionally felt more motivated and valued being able to access learning and advice from their colleagues as a result of such strong working relationships. They also had a deeper appreciation of the benefits of establishing a personal connection and identifying shared interests which would underpin ongoing professional relationships. Academic staff valued continuity of staff contacts, to the extent that they were concerned when there were retention issues with professional services staff in key roles.

When professional services were perceived to have let participants down, these failures were experienced differently by the two staff groups, although the resulting levels of frustration were similar. Academic staff were concerned about the blind application of rules and regulations and the locus of control for decision-making about department activities or student matters, as well as the additional workload resulting from poor levels of professional support. They were also more exercised about the financial implications of service failings which led to the loss of research funding or lower student numbers in

their departments. Professional services staff felt the effects of service failings in terms of their own efficacy and efficiency. They cited the need to become more assertive in their dealings with professional service colleagues, and the need to escalate issues through their chains of command, but they were concerned about the consequences of these actions for their own professional reputations.

Field / discipline

Although data was analysed by discipline or professional field, there were very limited variations in the findings by these variables. Participants from a scientific background had a slightly higher appreciation for having a named contact and a personal connection with a 'go-to person', whilst those from a humanities background highlighted the importance of communication and shared understandings of priorities to a slightly greater extent. In all other respects the experiences and perceptions of participants did not diverge on the basis of disciplinary background.

Job role

As above for discipline, there were only marginal differences of any significance when the data was analysed by job role of participants. The position and responsibilities of Heads of Department and Departmental Operations Managers meant that many of their concerns were the same, as these roles are primarily focused on achieving the best outcomes for an academic department. These job roles most valued collaborative relationships built on honesty and a personal connection, which allowed the service provider to understand the department's needs and the development of shared values and interests. They also viewed co-location of professional services staff within academic departments as important, and saw this as facilitating such close collaborative relationships, because the individual professional services staff member was then exposed to the departmental culture and imperatives on a daily basis. In all other categories the findings mirrored those of the full data set.

Gender

For the majority of issues there were no discernible differences between male and female participants' experiences. The main discrepancies were that women mentioned the benefits of collaboration, personal connections and accessing advice from colleagues more frequently than men, and men were more exercised about the constraints of bureaucracy, rules and regulations.

Age

There were no material differences in the data by age category.

Ethnicity

There were no material differences in the data by ethnicity.

Time in role and length of service

There were few material differences between participants with different lengths of service and time in role. However, there was a higher rate of scepticism reported by those with over 10 years' service in role, and for those with under 3 years' service there was a greater appreciation for the know-how and institutional knowledge of professional services staff.

Prior experience in another HEI

There were few material differences between those who had worked at another institution and those who had not, apart from in the identification of contextual factors influencing the exchange relationship. Those who had not worked elsewhere mentioned the challenges of organisational change more frequently than others, whilst those who had worked elsewhere were more likely to recognise the influence of organisational culture in the development of working relationships.

Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the research data by exploring the findings for each of the three service exchange stages. Expectations are shown to influence perceptions of service experience, and service experience in turn influences the outcomes of the exchange relationship, as anticipated in the conceptual framework detailed in Chapter 5. This overview positions the discussion which follows in Chapters 9 to 12, indicating how the dual strands of service quality and relationship quality intertwine in an internal exchange setting. Discussion in the next chapters unpicks the emerging themes identified above by examining both service quality and relationship quality in greater detail, and explores the implications of service exchange relationship quality in a university context.

CHAPTER 9: INTERPERSONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS IN SERVICE EXCHANGE RELATIONSHIPS

Service exchange relationships in universities take place against a backdrop of organisational and social structures, and the data explored these alongside the interpersonal relationships to provide a more contextualised perspective, and in line with the service eco-system concept. This chapter identifies and examines the organisational and interpersonal factors which influence perceptions of service quality to understand how these operate in internal service exchange relationships. In doing so, it directly addresses the first research question:

> *RQ1: What interpersonal and organisational factors influence the customer's expectations, experience and outcomes of university professional service use?*

9.1 Organisational factors

The context within which workplace relationships are situated is considered important in this study as it may affect how the relationships are experienced by individuals and play out between colleagues. In the course of the interviews, these aspects of university life were not overtly covered in the questioning, but emerged naturally in the course of the conversations when participants considered their experiences and the existence of any underlying or contributing factors. The coding process allowed the three contextual facets proposed in the conceptual model – organisational, service and social - to be identified in the data and collated and reviewed systematically.

Table 9.1 presents the contextual factors which were cited by research participants, ranked by number of participants mentioning each factor.

Table 9.1: Contextual factors cited by participants

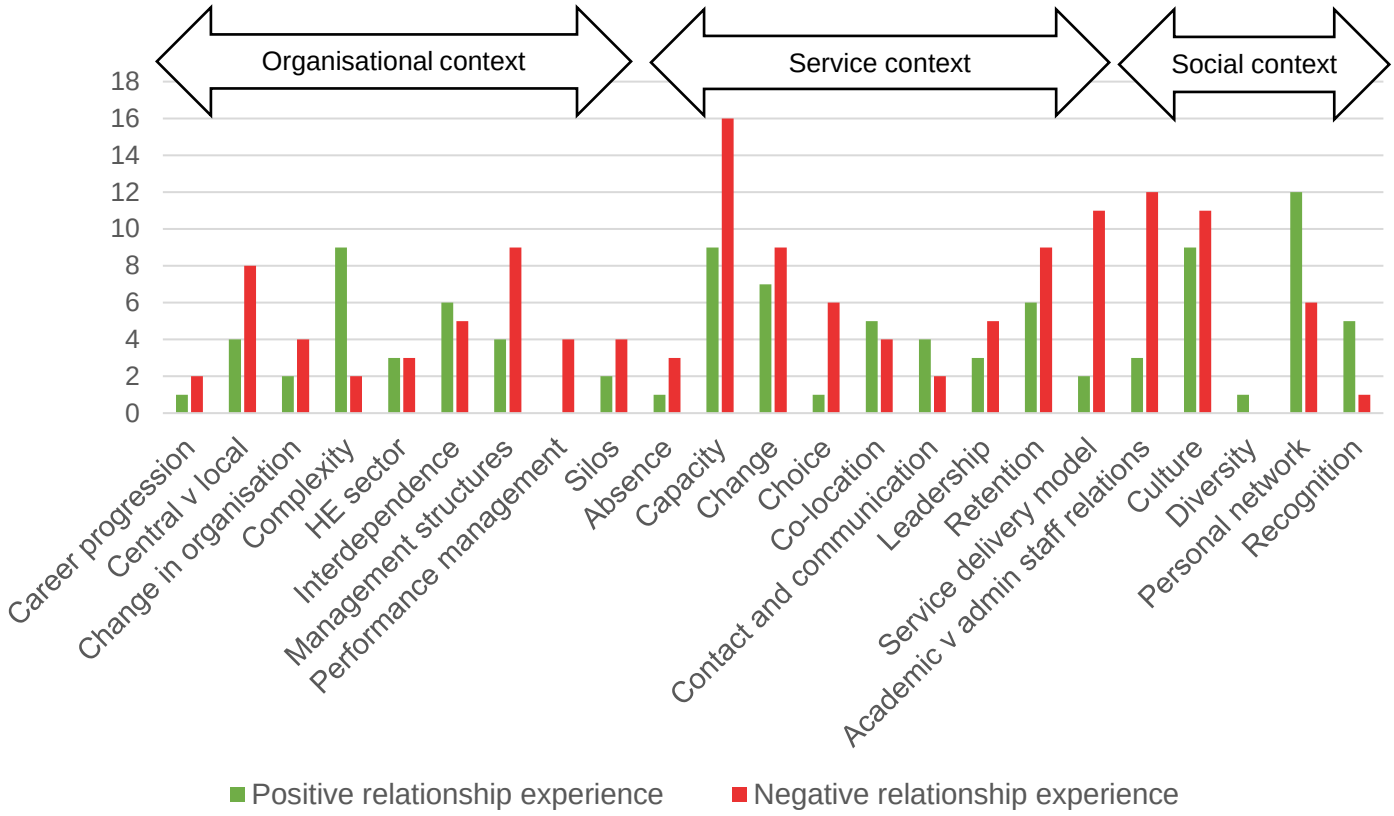
Organisational context	*Service context*	*Social context*
Management structures (28) Central v local provision (25) Interdependence (20) Complexity (23) Career progression (16) Organisational change (14) Silos (12)	Co-location (33) Capacity (32) Service delivery model (29) Service change (26) Staff retention (22) Leadership (18)	Academic v admin staff relations (24) Culture (21) Personal network (19) Recognition (14) Diversity (8)

The particular circumstances of each site led to some variations between the emphases on each factor, as noted in Chapter 8 Section 8.7. For example, participants at Site A spoke more frequently about management structures and the tension between central and local service provision, a theme which also drew more comments disproportionately from Heads of Departments and Operations Managers, because their day to day experience involves managing those tensions. Site B participants cited organisational change as a key factor in their experiences, whilst Site C was the originator of most citations of siloed structures and ways of working.

These contextual factors were analysed alongside the data for positive or negative relationship examples, in order to examine whether certain factors were more prevalent in certain circumstances. Figure 9.1 summarises the contextual factors implicated by participants in their examples of positive and negative service relationships. It is apparent that different factors are implicated in positive and negative experiences, rather than the quality of the experience being influenced by the presence or absence of any given factor.

Positive relationships draw on contextual factors such as personal networks and working culture, and these help individuals to navigate and respond to organisational change, complexity and interdependence. Poorer relationships are linked to issues in the service context such as capacity, unsatisfactory service delivery models, constrained choices and high turnover of contact staff, which are also associated with tensions in relationships between staff groups and problems with management structures.

Figure 9.1: Contextual factors cited in positive and negative relationship examples



The data in Figure 9.1 demonstrates the influence of context in the performance of interpersonal relationships, and findings show the significance of the concept of the service ecosystem (Vargo and Lusch 2011) in internal service relationships in a university setting. The findings provide specific empirical evidence grounded in experience in the Higher Education sector which illustrates theories highlighting contextual factors in service exchange (e.g. Akaka, Vargo and Lusch 2013; Mayer, Ehrhart and Schneider 2009). In particular, the association between contextual conditions and the dynamics of internal service exchange are evident in the different experiences and outcomes encountered by participants. These dynamics affect how relationships play out against the contextual backdrop of a university, and are the focus of the rest of this chapter.

9.1.1 Organisational context

In the organisational context, the issue of centralisation was the prevailing theme for Site C participants. This was not unexpected given that Site C is a highly centralised university, but some of the participants reflected on the consequences of this model for the provision of professional services which were predominantly centralised. The issue of control of resources was a factor for some participants:

> *And the problem with centralisation when you have centrally managed resource, it's not in your remit to say who is working for you, and if the university decided they fit better in another area or they are needed to fire-fight in another part of the institution, then that's tough. But that makes the service relationship difficult (Site C, Academic).*

For others, the issue was more about the implementation gap between policy formulation and what happens in practice, and the absence of consultation which would have bridged the gap:

> *When central projects are rolled out they often don't work because there's not enough consultation. So we've got a centralised project which has been rolled out without any discussion, without understanding the sensitivities or the nuances of course delivery or the subject. So I think when there's not enough consultation, discussion and you've never met the people rolling it out, you've got no relationship and it creates a lot of resentment, because those things have created a lot of difficult problems for us, and actually really upset the students (Site C, Academic).*

The principle of centralisation was seen as a neutral issue, but as illustrated in the quotes above, the implications of the approach were experienced as problematic. For instance, decisions made by centralised services did not always take into account local needs and tended towards a 'one-size-fits-all' approach which made implementation on the ground difficult. Top-down decision-making was viewed as paternalistic and out of touch with reality at the 'coal-face', and these effects were felt most profoundly when consultation was lacking. When centralised services did not consult with their customers a disconnect was reported which was seen to lead to service deficiencies. The importance of effective, two-way communications channels in mitigating against these negative effects was noted, with closer working relationships providing opportunities to foster mutual understanding. Without such relationships, mutual suspicion was seen to develop as a

consequence of the physical and organisational distance between centrally-organised services and distributed customers, as noted by this participant:

> *If you're not embedded in some way, shape or form, you'll never build that trust and that partnership working. You'll always be seen as Big Brother watching, always be seen as the outsider. And I think increasingly there has to be a way, a balance of getting professional services embedded in where they need to be. It's no good being periphery at all (Site C, Professional Services).*

In contrast to the views expressed by those who had experienced difficulties with centralisation, some Site A participants reflected on the deficiencies of a more decentralised model, and suggested that greater centralisation was the answer:

> *I find I'm back doing stuff that I'm pretty sure it would be more efficient if this was all done centrally, but there's not the resourcing centrally to do it, and the structures don't work that way (Site A, Academic).*
>
> *The big problem with being decentralised sometimes is that it's massively inefficient. So everybody has got the same problems associated with I don't know, pick your problem, GDPR compliance, and it's presented as a department problem, and it's no, we need to solve this, we need to solve this once, not have thirty five bunches of people running around in circles doing it thirty five slightly different ways, probably all wrong (Site A, Academic).*

These comments indicate that whatever management approach is selected by an institution there will be implications for the way that resources are allocated, issues of control and access to services, and that there may be unintended consequences which staff have to navigate in their interactions with colleagues.

Linked to issues of centralisation, participants recognised that interdependence is a feature of large, complex organisations such as universities, and that organisational risk is increased if the sub-units are not working effectively with and for each other. Management structures were perceived as hindering efforts to mitigate such risk, adding structural complexity through matrix management approaches, or artificially fragmenting services with a 'silo' mentality. A key issue raised by participants based in academic departments was that whilst they might have good relationships with individual services, the difficulties arose when the lack of co-ordination across the institution led to multiple urgent tasks being placed on departments at once, and often during the most

academically-pressurised points of the year. The competing demands emanating from professional services departments led to participants concluding that their colleagues in centralised services had limited understanding of the academic context, and a 'them and us' narrative was detected in the language they used. Tensions were experienced as a systemic issue in which professional services staff were implicated:

> *Everyone who does this thinks that their priority is the only priority, and is completely unaware that different bits of the university are throwing things at the department at the same time (Site A, Academic).*

Effective collaboration was seen to be possible only through the efforts, commitment and goodwill of individuals in overcoming such organisational obstacles:

> *They will arrange to come and see me or I'll go and see them so we can have a face to face conversation, walk the building, decide what we're going to do with certain things, and work collaboratively (Site C, Professional Services).*

9.1.2 Service context

In the service context, the professional services cited most frequently as being critical to the participants were HR, finance and research support, closely followed by registry, legal, estates, IT and marketing functions. In several examples, participants reflected on changes in the ways in which services were provided, and how these had altered their existing relationships with service colleagues, indicating that the service delivery model was a key factor in the service context. Participants also recognised that the individual service providers with whom they interacted were influenced by the work culture and conditions in their service department, and that within the university there are notable differences in culture between departments, disciplines and professions, in keeping with the findings of Sporn (1996). In considering the nature of these services and their working relationships with them, the key factors perceived by participants as influencing the development of effective working relationships were capacity and staff turnover, the service delivery model and the organisation of resources.

Where participants described less positive working relationships with professional support service colleagues, the primary contextual factor mentioned was capacity. There was a large degree of recognition that many professional services did not have the resources or capacity to provide the level of support or service quality that was expected

or required of them, and that they were under-resourced and over-stretched. This factor led participants to be more forgiving of service failures to a certain point, after which frustration then took over:

> *I have the feeling that they are overstretched shall we say, so it's not always possible for them to give the level of service to us that perhaps we would like and that they would like to give us (Site B, Academic).*
>
> *I'm sure the individuals are not deliberately being obstructive or lacking in outputs, they're probably just spread way too thin (Site B, Academic).*
>
> *Maybe it's massively under-resourced, but it's so frustrating (Site C, Academic)*

Capacity and resourcing issues were frequently cited by participants as underlying causes of tensions in their working relationships with professional services staff, with the negative implications of staff turnover and absence a particular issue.

Institutional resource allocation decisions were questioned, as well as the economic wisdom of requiring academic staff to undertake lower level administrative duties which did not demand academic judgement because of capacity issues in centrally-delivered professional services, as in this response:

> *I'm getting paid quite a lot to do some really basic things, and it doesn't seem like the best use of funds (Site A, Academic).*

Issues concerning staff retention of valued professional service colleagues were also flagged, as these compounded capacity issues through a loss of institutional knowledge and memory. Staff turnover also meant continual reinvestment in developing interpersonal relationships, which then reduced exchange efficiency over time. One participant had had four changes of business partner in the space of three years in both critical HR and finance functions, resulting in reticence in investing in such relationships in future.

The role of the service manager in allocating limited resources was recognised, along with an understanding that the leadership capacity and skills of the service unit manager could influence the service quality experienced. Where there was a perceived mismatch between the working culture of the service provider and that of the customer, the role of the leader in generating an effective culture and service climate was noted:

> *If you are led in a certain way, managed in a certain way and accountable in a certain way, and the whole team is that, then you will generally be offering a better service (Site C, Professional Services)*

Participants at all three sites highlighted the service delivery model as a feature in their negative service experiences. In particular, the use of resource accounts as a means of handling enquiries to a service was viewed unfavourably in Sites A and B, whereas at Site C the introduction of online portals drew similar commentary. These approaches to service delivery were experienced as 'faceless', anonymous and unsympathetic to customer needs, and were viewed as barriers to accessing support as the opportunity for personal interaction was removed. As noted in the third comment below, the implication is that no one person can be held responsible for taking the required action:

> *I was meant to be writing to an email address and I had no idea who the person was, so I couldn't even greet, I couldn't even put a greeting 'dear...' I couldn't personalise my message…I just don't like it. I find it very, I wouldn't say uncomfortable – it felt uncomfortable to start off with – it no longer feels uncomfortable, but it irritates me. I think it is not a humane way to work with people (Site B, Academic).*
>
> *The system is a kind of barrier that interferes with that person to person interaction, so now you get an email saying 'sorry but don't speak to me, put it on the system', but sometimes I just want to speak to somebody (Site C, Academic).*
>
> *They have a central inbox – and emails just go into a black-hole because no-one is taking ownership to respond (Site B, Professional Services).*

Whilst participants appreciated the rationale behind these service delivery models such as business continuity and fairness, they reported a strong sense of disempowerment from a customer perspective when services failed to deliver against expectations. When there were problems or a lack of response, staff did not know who to contact to chase up their request for help as no one individual was identifiable as responsible for taking action. Participants found it difficult to personalise a request for support when they were unable address a person by name, and the model precludes attempts to develop a personal connection or bond. This was experienced as reducing the service exchange interaction to a transaction between two automatons, dehumanising both the customer and the provider, and excluding the potential for innovative or collaborative working to occur.

Given the findings outlined in Chapter 8 Section 8.5 on the significance of the personal connection in fostering positive workplace relationships, the use of depersonalised enquiry tools may be a cause for concern if the negative consequences are not mitigated in some way. This finding provides empirical support for Schneider and Bowen's (2019) call for greater attention to be paid to the role of employees in front-line and internal service roles and the consequences of technology in service delivery. Schneider and Bowen (2019) propose that as technology plays an increasing role in service delivery, staff who can design service systems with how people will use them in mind will be vital.

Co-location was viewed as a beneficial service model characteristic in several cases, because of the opportunities it provides for social interaction and deeper engagement with business issues which foster understanding and ownership of the customer's concerns:

> *[She] is embedded in an academic department and so gets to see both sides, so she understands much better what we're trying to do, and what makes the department successful in a way that people who work in finance office or HR simply don't (Site A, Academic).*

Consistent with this, the service delivery model which was cited most positively across all three sites was the business partner model, where staff had a named contact in major professional services such as HR and finance who could then provide tailored support and frequent, regular interaction. This model supported the development of strong personal connections and deep understanding of the working cultures of each part of the institution, and produced opportunities for collaborative ways of working for mutual benefit. Both customer and provider gained value from a better grasp of the pressures and priorities of their colleagues, and this allowed them to co-operate more effectively:

> *I think it's the relationship, the business partner relationship that brokers that one point of contact that you can go through and liaise with. And no matter what's going on underneath you know you can go to that person and they'll do the navigating of their service (Site C, Professional Services).*
>
> *The business partner is somebody who you feel is as committed to the success of the organisation as you are, and who will work with you and listen to what you say and help you to achieve what you want to achieve (Site A, Professional Services).*

Whilst co-location could provide a short-cut to developing interpersonal relationships, other participants noted that co-location in itself was not necessarily the answer, as in this response which highlights that physical proximity on its own is not sufficient for a strong working relationship to emerge:

> *I don't even know where they sit but apparently they sit somewhere in this building, but everything is by email. I'm not sure if they are downstairs or in the corridor over there, but either way they are somewhere within 200 metres away, and yet I have no idea who they are, what they are, where they are. And so the physical location in that sense has made zero difference (Site A, Academic).*

9.1.3 Social context

In the social context of the institution, the workplace culture influences staff behaviour and relational norms which govern how colleagues interact with each other (Vargo and Lusch 2016). In the interview data, the existence of sub-cultures within institutions was apparent, as participants described differences in working culture between departments, and the implications if these were at odds with each other. Whether departments were perceived as having a 'learning culture', a 'blame culture' or a 'customer service culture' were identified as influential in how relationships could be developed with individuals from those departments and across departmental boundaries. The effects of working culture were felt at both local and institutional levels, and went to the heart of organisational success:

> *I actually think it profoundly impacts on the ability of the institution to achieve its stated goal, that the difference between a good positive culture and the negative, sniping, neurotic culture has a profound effect on whether or not the institution is able to (Site C, Professional Services).*

When participants described positive examples of working relationships with professional services staff, the most frequently cited contextual characteristic was personal networks, which played an instrumental role in perceived high service quality. Many participants, particularly academic staff, appreciated the value of the personal networks that their professional service colleagues were able to access, and valued opportunities to expand their own networks through effective working relationships. These findings substantiate Molm's (2010) theory of reciprocity, as they illustrate how individuals gain social capital through reciprocal exchange embedded in a social network, and how co-operative behaviours are promoted as a result. Strong

relationships were also seen to enable participants to navigate organisational change and the complexities and interdependencies of institutional structures and processes, fostering positive working cultures beyond the interpersonal relationship itself.

The interview questions posed did not specifically ask for views about the relationships between staff groups, such as between academic and administrative staff, but participants from academic and professional service backgrounds raised this issue as an underlying factor in their thinking about working relationships on campus. Responses alluded to a mutual lack of understanding and appreciation of the roles and responsibilities of both parties and provided examples of incompatible ways of working and divergent priorities which were an enduring feature of these relationships:

> *The main issues are that academics don't always understand what professional staff do, and professional staff don't understand what academics are coming from, and that's the same everywhere. On the one hand it's "those bureaucrats are stopping me from doing what I want to do and they haven't got a clue", and on the other side of the fence it's "those clueless academics just don't begin to understand financial management or corporate management or HR processes and they are just trying to cut corners and make it up as they go along, and they need squashing before they get out of hand". So it's that basic tension that is always going to be there (Site A, Academic).*

Participants reflected on the interdependent and symbiotic nature of these relationships but were also clear that the purpose of professional services is to support the academy, and this point was made by both academic and non-academic participants. It was suggested that the interdependency itself could sometimes result in role confusion, with the role of customer and provider becoming muddled, as in this example:

> *They are dictating to the research community, rather than serving the research community, because they are hamstrung by having to meet their own targets and objectives. And I think sometimes the customer / supplier relationship gets muddled (Site C, Academic).*

One participant spoke of observing questionable behaviours by academic staff towards professional service colleagues, and noted how this could be counter-productive and potentially career-limiting given the inherent interdependencies of university working life:

> *Professional services are really important because ultimately they can be the ones who decide whether they are going to help you or*

> *not, and there are tasks you can do on your own like publishing; there are tasks you can't (Site A, Academic).*

Animosity was seen to develop when professional services staff seemed to forget their role, and to take it upon themselves to dictate to academic departments. This was exacerbated when professional services staff imposed internal deadlines which conflicted with core academic activity or showed a lack of insight into the pressures of academic life:

> *Some of the frustration from our perspective arises because people in 'the university', the administrators, them, that lot, that hopeless bunch of wastrels over there, genuinely don't sometimes seem to understand what we do on a day to day basis, and what the pressures are. And I see that most commonly… as head of department I see it a lot when people impose deadlines. So we had a safety audit, and "we need a response by the end of next week". Well "A I'm in the middle of the strategy renewal, and B I've got 200 exams to mark by the end of next week. Were you aware that we examine students? Did you know that we have to mark the papers?" No, of course you don't, you've not met one (Site A, Academic).*

Tensions between staff may also result from issues of power, authority and control, where these are seen as a constraint. Both academic and professional services participants noted issues of agency, in that they were not always able to influence critical decisions which affected them, and that they sometimes felt they were victims of power-games of their colleagues. Participants found this especially frustrating and disempowering when they had previously had control, but due to changes in management structures they no longer had the authority to make decisions about support staffing that they once had. Such tensions are also evident in 'them and us' cultures and in relationships between academic and administrative staff.

> *You want to be master of your own destiny, and you want to have control. If we get something wrong and something goes wrong and we fail as a result of decisions that I've made or that we've made then you deal with that and you accept the consequences of that. But I'd rather that than to have no control and to see something go horribly wrong and not be able to affect it, and still be blamed for it (Site A, Professional Services).*

Participants recognised that different priorities and drivers affected the ability of the two staff groups to work together effectively, but that strong working relationships could foster

shared interests and mutual understanding, so that each party achieves its objectives. Professional Services participants who worked in academic departments sometimes felt caught in the middle between centralised professional support services and local academic colleagues where there were conflicting agendas, and felt that their loyalties could be called into question by both sides. When they experienced being let down by their centralised professional services colleagues, they felt this reflected badly on themselves and their own reputations, as academic colleagues did not necessarily distinguish between different types of professional services staff:

> *I think it's how bad it makes us look. I get really annoyed about that. It looks like we don't care as an administration, and the academics don't tend to think about administration beyond… we're often a filter for 'the administration' (Site A, Professional Services).*

In more positive scenarios, the professional services staff based in departments were better positioned to bridge these tensions between staff groups as they had the know-how and language of both groups to draw on to develop trusting, productive relationships, underpinned by shared understandings of priorities and practices. This finding confirms the effect of co-worker trust outlined by Svensson (2018), who showed that a lack of shared norms, history and understanding leads to difficulties in co-ordination and lower levels of trust between colleagues.

These findings on the organisational factors influencing the quality of relationships between internal service providers and their customer colleagues indicate the relevance to this research of social exchange theories which highlight the role of context. For example, Edvardsson, Skalen and Tronvoll (2012) point to social structures and norms which underpin service structures and practices and provide the means to co-create value with exchange partners, and Mayer, Ehrhart and Schneider (2009) illustrate how levels of interdependence in the context of exchange relationships can affect the service climate. These ideas are substantiated in the responses of participants across all three sites studied.

9.2 Interpersonal factors

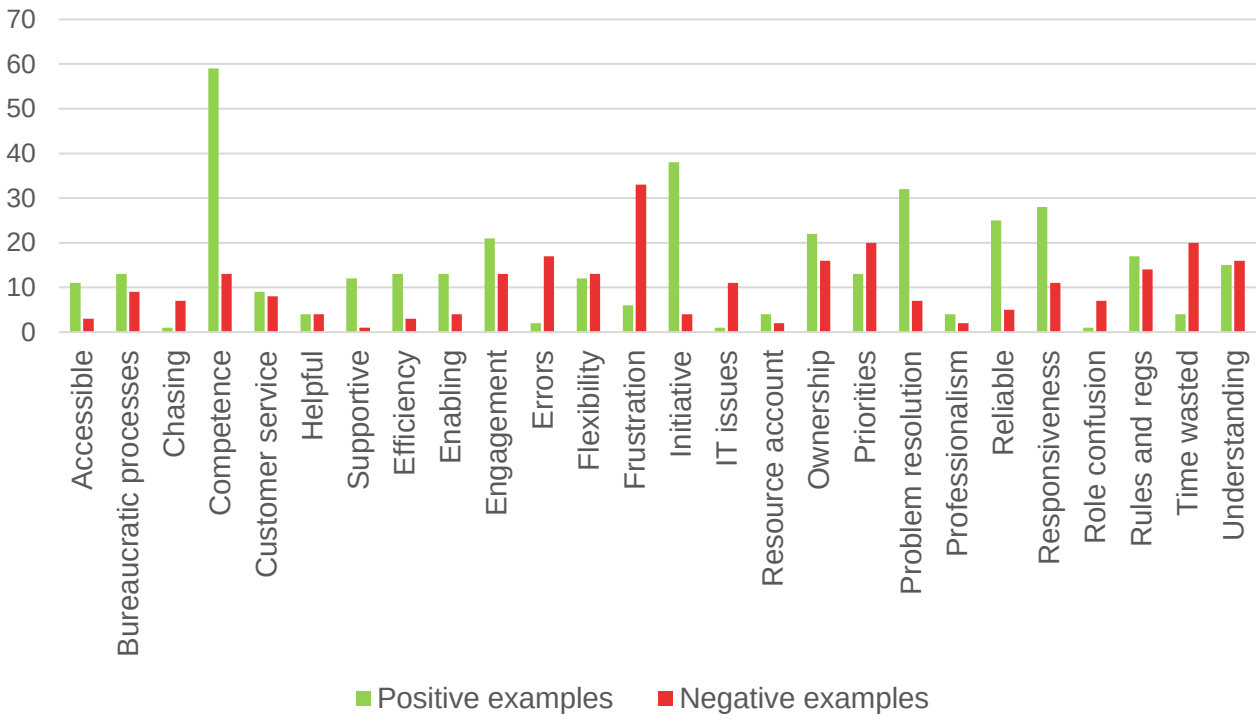
Whilst the organisational and social context outlined above positions the service exchange relationship within the social structures of the institution, the main focus of the conversations with participants was their experiences of interpersonal relationships on an individual level. The interpersonal factors which emerged through the empirical

research are examined here, first in relation to service quality and second in relation to relationship quality. Chapter 10 explores the links between these two elements in greater depth, and how they combine to influence internal service exchange relationships.

9.2.1 Service quality

When participants provided examples of service quality, they frequently described their experiences at the level of the service rather than the individuals involved in providing the service. Service quality was evaluated by participants according to levels of competence, initiative, responsiveness and reliability encountered at a service level, despite these being mediated by individuals. The individual professional services staff members were therefore seen as the face of the service. Figure 9.2 provides a summary of service characteristics identified in positive and negative exchange experiences.

Figure 9.2: Aspects of service quality cited in positive and negative experiences



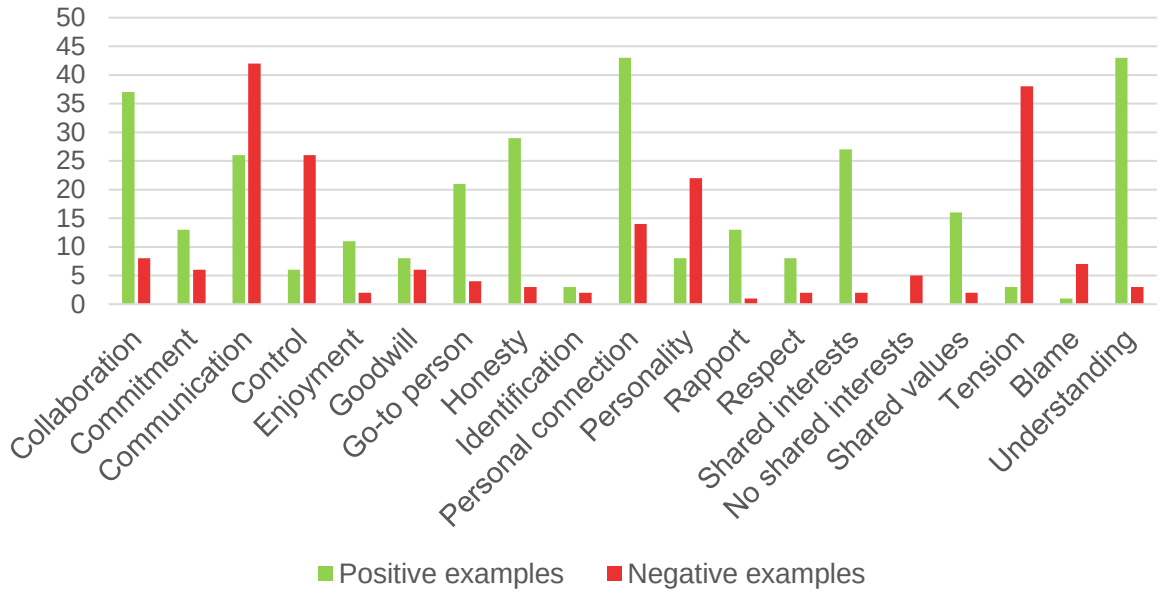
Different factors are implicated in positive and negative experiences, indicating that some service characteristics operate in different ways. For instance, reliability, competence and initiative were predominantly cited as features of positive experiences, whereas understanding, flexibility and ownership were implicated in both positive and negative service experiences.

Interpersonal factors were indirectly identified by participants through their experiences of service responsiveness, the extent to which an individual was engaged with the customers' needs and exhibited a sense of ownership, and their satisfaction with customer service levels in terms of helpfulness and support. When participants spoke in detail about interactions with individual service providers, they tended to speak in relational terms where the experience had been positive, and in service quality terms where they had had a more difficult relationship. This is also evidenced in Figure 9.2 above where negative experiences cluster around frustration, errors, time wasted and competing priorities, none of which are directly attributable to interpersonal factors.

9.2.2 Relationship quality

The most frequently identified characteristics of relationship quality in positive experiences were interpersonal in nature and included understanding, personal connection, collaboration, honesty and the existence of shared interests and values. In less positive relationships, issues relating to communication, tension between colleagues and personality were the primary interpersonal factors in play. Many examples demonstrated the influence of more than one of these characteristics, indicating the inter-related nature of these concepts. Figure 9.3 shows the prevalence of the characteristics cited.

Figure 9.3: Aspects of relationship quality cited in positive and negative experiences



A deep understanding of the needs of the customer enabled a service provider to strive to meet those needs effectively, but participants also recognised their own responsibility to understand the pressures and expectations of the service provider. Mutual understanding was therefore a key factor in positive working relationships, which were strongly collaborative and had the ability to influence both strategic and operational matters. Such high levels of mutual understanding were also seen to increase exchange efficiency, in that matters did not require in-depth explanation and rationale, and required actions could be anticipated or responded to more quickly. This theme is expanded in Chapter 10 Sections 10.1 and 10.4 below.

Mutual understanding of pressures and priorities also facilitated greater tolerance because each party could appreciate the conditions in which their colleagues were operating. In some cases co-location was cited as the basis for such deep understanding between colleagues, but other examples showed equally strong understanding without colleagues being co-located.

> *I think she gets what we're about, and she understands our strategy, and she's been with us since the beginning so she's fully involved in what we've done. She's part of us and part of our success (Site B, Professional Services).*
>
> *Because they are there and because we know each other's working practices, I guess we all adapt to each other's modus operandi, and that does very much enable those relationships to work much more smoothly (Site C, Professional Services).*

The personal connection is a key characteristic and was cited frequently as the reason for a positive working relationship. Examples given ranged from seeing the service provider as a fellow human being as opposed to a faceless system, to developing a personal relationship and forming strong, lasting friendship bonds:

> *They're not automatons, they are human beings and they've got their own input to make as well (Site B, Academic).*
>
> *You want to come to work with people that you like. So on that side it's nice to work with people that you've got to know and you're fond of and you know a little bit about (Site B, Professional Services).*

Such bonds facilitated mutual understanding, collaborative behaviours and the granting of favours:

> *When you actually have that personal relationship you're more willing to go out of your way for the other person (Site C, Academic).*

As demonstrated in these comments, recognising and respecting a colleague as a multi-faceted individual and fellow human-being generated positive emotion and citizenship behaviours on the part of the participant, echoing recent research into buyer-seller relationships (Bourassa et al. 2018).

Collaborative relationships facilitated cross-institutional interactions, and honesty was identified as a key factor in the development of such relations with colleagues. Strongly rooted in trusting relationships, honesty and openness in communications with colleagues signified for participants a positive regard for the other person and facilitated more productive interactions as a result. The ease of communication with known individuals again points to exchange efficiency, saving time and effort for both parties:

> *My good relationships are the ones where I'm able to pick up a phone and have a conversation, or pop in and have a chat and be able to talk one on one and explain, and them know that I'm coming in to the situation – even if it's a negative scenario – with a view to trying to solve it from both ends if you like (Site C, Professional Services).*

Shared interests and shared values were also identified by participants as important factors in their positive relationship experiences, particularly when these were collaborative in nature. The alignment of goals and agendas, such as improving the student experience, were crucial in participants' sense of working as a wider team, and in achieving the mutually-beneficial desired result.

With negative examples of relationship quality experiences, some of the same themes are present as with positive experiences, but with negative consequences. For example, communication was the most frequently cited factor, but comments referred to lack of effective communication. The inability of professional services colleagues to listen to their customers and the mismatch in communication styles between groups of colleagues were cited as detrimental to workplace relationships, along with the inability to present a rationale or justification of decisions to help people to understand institutional policies and decision-making processes:

> *Ultimately I think where it falls apart is when the services are not listening, or they are not even asking the question (Site A, Academic).*

> *Sometimes it's the language it's written in that doesn't make sense to me as a scientist. Maybe it's written in service centre speak or professional service speak (Site B, Academic).*

Communication difficulties were also mentioned in relation to tensions and interpersonal conflict between staff. Examples given demonstrated an absence of understanding, goodwill or mutual respect, and described animosity, blame and antagonism as features of these relationships. The personal cost of such tensions was readily apparent:

> *It's incredibly time consuming, it's exhausting and it feels like a battle. And I think if you come to work feeling like you have to go to battle all the time, I've got enough battles I'm dealing with in this department, I don't need to battle with the people who are supposed to be supporting me" (Site A, Professional Services).*
>
> *I think that was because it came back to her not understanding apparently my needs, she took a very antagonistic approach, very distant, centrally, very "I know better than you", slightly patronising, didn't ever kind of want to get to know about our business (Site B, Professional Services).*

In a large number of examples of negative relationship experiences, participants cited personality as the root cause. Relationship difficulties were attributed to clashes in personalities, mismatches of personality types, incompatible senses of humour, and different preferences for ways of working:

> *How the institution works it's very often left to individuals to sort of forge their own relationships, and by that nature you get some people who are more willing to work together than others (Site A, Professional Services).*
>
> *There are just some that have a 'can-do' and some that have a 'can't-do' attitude. It could be as simple as that (Site B, Academic).*
>
> *We're all different personality types and I think you're drawn to certain things. I do think it's whether you can build that personal relationship with that personality type (Site B, Professional Services).*

In these examples, the individual service provider and the resulting relationship was seen as the cause of the difficult working relationship, rather than any structural or organisational flaws. In a similar vein, the existence or absence of a personal connection was seen as making a significant difference to the working relationship experience, with lack of personal connection as an indicator of a negative relationship. In some cases it was not an actively poor personal connection which was to blame, but the lack of any

connection at all. This could be caused by poor communication, but was also attributed across all three sites to the implementation of impersonal IT systems through which requests for support had to be logged in place of personal contact with a named individual, or service models which operated in this way to pool enquiries, as detailed above in Section 9.1.2 on the service context. Such experiences can reduce exchange efficiency as a different colleague may pick up each enquiry, and the customer may have to explain their needs multiple times in the absence of a personal connection and any understanding of their context.

Chapter summary

This chapter has examined the findings from the empirical research to explain the organisational and interpersonal factors that influence the development of university professional service staff work relationships, and that affect perceptions of internal service quality on the part of their customers. By presenting these findings in relation to both service quality and relationship quality, the significance of contextual factors have been illustrated, as well as the dynamics of interpersonal relationships between colleagues. These relationship dynamics and their effects on internal service quality is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 10: RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS AND SERVICE QUALITY

This chapter explores the interplay between the quality of the working relationship and the customer's perceptions of internal service quality, addressing the second research question:

> *RQ2: What is the association between the interpersonal relationship and the customer's perceptions of service quality?*

The discussion is presented in five broad thematic areas, allowing a focused examination of each theme and the relationship dynamics which were uncovered. This chapter also assesses the extent to which these research findings support and add to the existing theoretical understandings of key concepts identified in the earlier literature review.

10.1 Competence, efficacy and performance

In the examples of exchange relationships provided by participants, the most prevalent service characteristic was competence, especially when relationships were deemed to be positive and productive. The specialist knowledge, skills and experience of professional support staff were seen to be enabling and complementary, and provided the foundation for the working relationship. Competence in both technical and interpersonal skills was valued, as participants recognised the benefits they received from service providers both in terms of the support they received and the way in which it was provided. The idea that professional services staff can act as custodians of institutional knowledge and memory (McNay 2005) was supported in these findings:

> *At the end of the day it's getting the right people with the right attitudes and the right interpersonal skills is usually the biggest thing I think (Site A, Professional Services).*
>
> *They had been in the university for a long time, they were very knowledgeable, they had a lot of case history knowledge, and knowledge of how the institution works and the policies that were in place, things that might be coming down the line, what we could and couldn't do (Site B, Professional Services).*

Findings support the view in relationship quality literature that competence is an antecedent to relationship quality, alongside reliability (Subramony 2012). Participants expressed feeling more confident in relying on service providers when they demonstrated competence, allowing trust to emerge once their experience of an individual's performance was positive in relation to their abilities and character. This

finding also supports the work of Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) which positions ability, benevolence and integrity as precursors to trust development. In contrast, where errors were made and staff were seen to not have the competence required to deliver an effective service, the effects on the interpersonal relationship could be severe:

> *We've had so many mistakes made in student services over the last year or two, so many mistakes that to be honest it comes to the point now that people won't speak to each other (Site B, Academic).*

In trust literature, competence is linked to the development of cognitive or rational assessments of trustworthiness (e.g. Hardin 1996; Kramer 1999), and competence-based trust is distinct from integrity-based trust (Connelly et al. 2018). The findings of this thesis on competence and relationship quality extend the work of Connelly et al. (2018) by demonstrating that this distinction also applies within organisations between colleagues, as well as between organisations.

These findings indicate that the competence of service providers is a base-level requirement upon which relationship quality can be built, as participants predominantly spoke of competence as a factor when describing their experiences, rather than explicitly as a service expectation. This may be because a base-level of competence was seen as an unwritten expectation which did not need elaboration, or it only emerged through detailed examination of real examples. Competence as a core concept in service measurement theory is seen as one of the indicators of service quality (e.g. Ehrhart et al. 2011; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985), and this is also supported by these findings.

Competence is linked very closely to efficacy and performance, as evidenced through findings which illustrate the negative consequences of lack of competence. Where service providers were noted to be competent, the participants remarked on the positive effects for their ability to do their own jobs effectively. Numerous examples were cited where participants had felt more personally effective in their work and able to achieve more as a result of the positive working relationships they had with service providers, on whom they could count. Where service providers did not have the skills or knowledge needed, this led to participants having to engage in trouble-shooting, double-checking information received, escalating to senior managers and losing confidence in the service to the extent that they did the work themselves, found alternative providers or went without support:

> *I think it can be quite a dispiriting experience, you just sometimes feel like you're wading through treacle, because maybe something hasn't worked or you haven't been able to contact somebody, so you end up doing half the job yourself and you do it much less effectively (Site C, Academic).*
>
> *I think that just makes the whole working day difficult and less productive, and you spend far too much time on problem solving that you really don't need to be (Site C, Academic).*

These outcomes had consequences for participants' productivity through wasted time and increased workload as well as negatively affecting the credibility of the service provider for future interactions. Participants also remarked on the detrimental consequences for their productivity stemming from the frustration and negative emotions experienced as a result of service failings. These findings support the proposition that the productivity of the customer and provider is an outcome of service quality (Parasuraman 2002) and provide evidence of how this link plays out in an internal service setting where alternative providers are not always available, leading to colleagues engaging in 'companionships of misery' (Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2006).

As a component of productivity, efficiency arose as a characteristic of working relationships with service providers. Service quality was seen to lead to efficiencies in job performance for both customer and provider, enabling greater productivity, but it also related to efficiency in the relationship itself. Where there was a strong relationship between the customer and provider, this had positive effects on exchange efficiency from a transactional perspective. The significance of exchange efficiency as a factor in service relationships is evident in the data, supporting existing relationship quality theory (Palmatier et al. 2008). However the findings from this study propose exchange efficiency as an outcome of a positive relationship not an antecedent, such that once understanding, trust and confidence in the other party has been established, exchange efficiency is then possible:

> *Investing that time in developing those relationships at an early stage saves time in the long term, and even on a day to day basis, if I know that I'm talking to someone who understands the context I'm talking to them in, that's going to be a quicker outcome and probably a better outcome (Site A, Professional Services).*
>
> *I knew that I could do things more rapidly, because with other people I might have had to really get my case together, know all of the variables, all of the complexities all of the issues and get very*

> *prepared before launching into something, whereas with her … I could just launch into it and it helped short-cut things. It was an effective way of working and an efficient way of working (Site B, Professional Services).*

As outlined in Chapter 8 Section 8.3, the benefits of reduced transaction costs achieved through strong, trusting relationships as proposed by Kramer (2010), including less need for control or monitoring, is strongly supported by evidence in the data which demonstrates these effects in practice. Where exchange efficiency was experienced, participants frequently mentioned that they would approach a particular individual in preference to others as a direct consequence of the relationship quality. When staff turnover meant that service relationships were discontinued, participants noted the loss of this exchange efficiency, and the need to establish a strong working relationship with the new provider before they could benefit again from such efficiencies. This evidences the cost of staff changes in service exchange relationships in terms of productivity.

Productivity and performance are closely related, and can apply at individual as well as institutional levels. In internal service provision, performance cannot always be measured in terms of organisational or financial performance because of the indirect nature of the service. Nonetheless, the research data did provide some instances of service outcomes which could be regarded in these terms. In some cases participants reported experiencing loss of resources as a result of accounting errors made by service providers, resulting in their department's performance becoming compromised. In other cases the inability to provide the required level of service resulted in the loss of business opportunities and earned income. If such outcomes were recorded in a systematic way it would be possible to quantify the effects of performance in financial terms.

In researching the consequences of poor quality services, evidence was uncovered which demonstrated the effects of internal service quality on external service providers and by extension on external customers. Cases of reduced student numbers were cited as a result of poor marketing and recruitment support, with direct financial consequences for the academic department, and another case involved the loss of funding for research due to poor reporting practices:

> *If these issues aren't resolved and I don't have enough funding coming into the school I'm going to have to make staff redundant. And it's all very well for the central team to say "oh we're really sorry,*

yes we made a mistake", it's not them that's going to be losing their jobs (Site B, Academic).

You end up with four times the amount of work because things have not been done, or even more seriously you lose money because things have not been done right, because people weren't there, they weren't there for the audit or they didn't get the right documents in for the audit (Site C, Academic).

Conversely, some participants cited examples where research funding was won as a result of strong working relationships which enabled high quality bids to be developed with critical expertise from professional services staff. Such examples promote effective work cultures and performance from an internal service perspective, contributing significantly to organisational strength and capabilities.

The findings provide additional empirical evidence of the link between internal service quality and performance, with both positive and negative consequences. In particular, the costs of negative performance in internal service quality were demonstrated in financial terms as well as through increased incidents of complaints, chasing, low morale, retention and absenteeism (Smith, Smith and Clarke 2007). This evidence underlines the implications of service quality for organisational performance as well as for the efficacy and productivity of individual members of staff.

10.2 Bureaucracy, rules and discretion

Managerialism is a prevalent theme in HE literature, but as a concept it was not mentioned directly by any of the research participants. However, the characteristics of managerialism were discussed during the interviews, particularly in relation to centralisation and the institutional emphasis on effectiveness and efficiency through the implementation of 'one-size-fits-all' approaches. Participants mentioned league-tables, performance measures and the UK's Research Excellence Framework as part of their university workplace experience, but these were seen as unavoidable factors which were acknowledged as conditions in the HE context. In their dealings with professional support staff, participants valued efficiency when this supported their ability to deliver to objectives and to manage their own areas, time and workloads. They became critical of their institution when they felt that centralised bureaucratic processes made this more difficult or did not sufficiently reflect their business needs. There was a strong appreciation of the need for bureaucracy and efficient processes, but these were only

supported when they 'made sense', were appropriate and delivered benefits to the customer, and not solely to the provider:

> *My worry is that processes get in the way of things necessarily working. So you all want something to be done and there will be some complicated process that you have to go through that then becomes unfathomable, and things seem to take an awful lot longer than in my simple mind I think they should take (Site B, Academic).*
>
> *Rules and regulations are there to help, to provide a framework, they're there to help, they shouldn't be an impediment, and they shouldn't be a frigging pain either (Site C, Academic).*

The data evidences much frustration stemming from perceived rigidity of processes and excessive use of forms for seemingly small requests. Staff at Site C particularly noted the occurrence of 'Catch-22' situations where progress could be stymied because processes were disjointed or mutually incompatible, and were not keeping up with organisational change. Whilst participants universally found unnecessary bureaucracy exasperating, constraining and time-consuming, they did acknowledge that some of the 'red tape' was imposed across the sector as a result of the regulatory environment in HE, and that such 'administrative hoops' were a fact of academic life as it is now experienced and as described by Gray (2015) and Davis, Rensburg and Ventor (2016). Some participants appreciated that professional services staff who worked on regulatory compliance actually protected academic staff time from the administrative and bureaucratic tasks involved which would otherwise fall to the academy:

> *She was by far the most efficient person at getting through university regulations, knew the institutional rules, would be supportive, adaptable (Site A, Academic).*

Professional services staff were valued when they used their specialist skills and expertise to navigate institutional processes and regulations, and colleagues relied on them to smooth the way in bureaucratically managed exercises such as course approval and academic partnership development. However, a minority of academic participants remarked that they would prefer to have more academic colleagues to share the academic workload than the increased numbers of administrative staff bringing their various bureaucratic demands:

> *We may have surpassed the 50/50 academic / non-academic and that's slightly worrying, because it's so hard to get an academic post approved, and it seems that every academic post brings another*

three non-academic posts, and you're thinking 'really?' (Site A, Academic).

This association between bureaucratic processes and professional services staff has the potential to be problematic and could have implications for constructive working relationships. Whilst some participants provided examples of positive contributions from professional staff who worked to reduce the effects of bureaucracy, there were numerous other examples of less productive working relationships which included factors relating to bureaucracy, and these highlighted tensions between the staff groups. Professional services staff were often negatively implicated in the application of institutional policies and processes, underlining earlier findings (Szekeres 2006) which recounted how support staff could be perceived by academic staff as instruments of unwelcome corporatisation:

They see themselves as guardians of rules, implementers of rules and they have a policing function some of them, it really is a policing function (Site C, Academic).

Some participants experienced the application of institutional rules as a deliberate barrier to consultation and discussion, and felt that they were implemented without due consideration for how they might be applied in practice. Others claimed that professional services staff hid behind the rules, and used them as an excuse not to have to engage in debate with academic colleagues. Several academic participants noted that professional services staff who designed policies and processes did not have sufficient understanding of the academic context and needs of academic departments to frame them appropriately:

All the key people who are the ones that create this quagmire of red tape, none of these people have ever taught or spent a minute with a student (Site A, Academic).

Where rules and regulations were experienced as obstructive and unhelpful, participants frequently referred to expectations of flexibility or discretion in their application. Many of the positive examples cited in the data demonstrated the use of discretion on the part of the service provider, whilst many of the negative examples drew on experiences where professional services staff had applied the rules blindly and without 'human intelligence' or interest in the consequences of their decisions:

The process was so rigid over something so small that it made us look stupid. The external [examiner] was saying "well why can't we

> *accept the marks"' and it was just "these are the university rules, so we can't" (Site C, Academic).*

In examples where discretion was valued and the service provider demonstrated flexibility in their approach as a result of a good understanding of the customer's needs, this contributed to higher relationship quality. The use of discretion is evidenced in the findings as having a positive influence on customer satisfaction, fostering stronger interpersonal relationships and the development of trust between customer and supplier on the basis of mutual understanding of needs and interests. This finding empirically reinforces earlier studies of discretionary behaviour (Gwinner et al. 2005), and underlines the significance of benevolence as an indicator of trustworthiness as proposed by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995). The willingness to be flexible was understood by participants as a recognition of the human consequences of bureaucratic decisions, and more accommodating, pragmatic behaviour on the part of the service provider signalled that the individual was positively disposed towards the customer.

The types of discretion expected by the participants of this study were creative discretion and deviant discretion. Creative discretion was alluded to in participant expectations that service providers would use their expertise, imagination and know-how to seek routes through bureaucratic processes which would meet the customer needs, not disrupting the rules but navigating the grey areas and loop-holes in their favour. Deviant discretion was observed in the desire for exemptions to be made or rules to be suspended in order to accommodate particular circumstances:

> *I'm happy for there to be rules and forms and processes as long as they make sense… So it's not the rule or the form itself, it's the way that people hold them as gatekeepers to things that should be happening, rather than thinking about what our business needs are or how we can get around it, or who can we talk to as somebody who can fix it. Who to ask and beg for special exemption (Site C, Academic).*

In evidencing these types of discretion the research data confirms existing theory (Kelley 1993) and extends its application to an internal service setting where relationships are ongoing and conducted over the long-term.

The findings of this current study also support the idea that bureaucratic controls and top-down policy development erode and replace organisational trust, and lead to a low-trust climate (Hoecht 2006). Where discretion was not forthcoming, participants felt that

they were not trusted by their colleagues to act in the interests of the university, and that they were disempowered as a result: “There’s not enough latitude to do things on the basis of trust” (Site C, Academic). This tension was particularly encountered where issues of centralisation were a feature of the provider-customer interaction, and where strained relationships between central and local parts of the university pivoted on the location of decision-making authority and control:

> *We all work for the same organisation, we’re all professional staff, but if you work in the department you’re somehow not to be trusted with the standard of your work” (Site A, Professional Services).*

This phenomenon was pronounced at Site A where both academic and professional services participants noted its existence as an organisational factor which had the potential to negatively influence their relationships with colleagues in other parts of the institution. Some participants noted that professional staff could be caught in the middle of such power-struggles. Research data obtained from senior staff based in academic departments confirm that middle managers in universities play a significant role in managing tensions between central and local interests (Clegg and McAuley 2005).

10.3 Ownership, problem resolution and engagement

The issue of ownership emerged as a major theme across all three sites, featuring in service expectations and experiences. Participants expected their professional services colleagues to take responsibility for tasks in their areas of expertise, to ‘own’ the issues presented to them, and to liaise with other colleagues in order to deliver effective solutions. In examples which were viewed as positive and productive, participants valued the commitment and dedication of their colleagues in tenaciously seeking solutions, in being prepared to make decisions, and to see an issue through to resolution. In particular, professional service colleagues were praised when they took full responsibility for co-ordinating actions with other service providers to deliver an integrated approach that saved the customer time and effort and eliminated the need for them to navigate complex organisational structures.

Where experiences were less positive, participants cited instances of being ‘passed from pillar to post’, leading to frustration and annoyance:

> *Part of the frustration of that relationship was trying to pin down who I could speak to to get the problem solved. You’d get passed from*

> *pillar to post, you don't know who to go to, and even if you do go to an individual it was like 'not my problem' (Site C, Professional Services).*

Ownership was seen as an indicator of professionalism and a willingness to be accountable to professional standards. When ownership was perceived to be lacking, participants found these relationships to be unprofessional and obstructive, and linked this with a lack of willingness to be held accountable for their part. Participants recounted being obliged to chase colleagues and behave assertively to obtain help or a decision, and having to push individual providers to take responsibility for tasks within their remit:

> *And as a customer I'm just not interested, if I ring one bit of a department I'm not interested in a long response that tells me that it's not your fault it's someone else's fault, I want you to take ownership of the issue and I think ownership is key. Take ownership of the issue and deal with it (Site C, Professional Services).*

> *It took about 12 weeks for this contract to get signed off, it went to everybody and their mother, they were passing it round like a yoyo, saying you need to look at this now, and you need to look at this now, and we were getting asked the same questions over and over again… I ended up having to go in and say "right, this is silly, because we have now been round full circle, you're asking the same questions you asked 8 weeks ago, one of you make a decision and get this contract signed or we're going to lose it". It was just stupid. So it's some of those things where people don't seem to want to take any responsibility for anything anymore (Site A, Professional Services).*

As indicated in these examples, the effort of chasing was time-consuming and draining, and as noted in Section 10.1 above, could have consequences for job performance and productivity, as well as being demotivating and having detrimental outcomes in relationship quality. The concept of ownership receives very limited attention in service quality and relationship quality literature, and only then in relation to customer ownership of value co-creation processes (Petri and Jacob 2016; Vargo 2008). This finding therefore contributes a new angle to relationship quality research by demonstrating the significance of ownership by service providers for internal service quality.

In some cases, the lack of willingness to take ownership was perceived to stem from a lack of empowerment as a broader issue within the institution. The individual's reticence in taking action was therefore linked to the working culture or the leadership of a service

which constrained actions, so that instances of poor service were seen to be part of a wider organisational problem. The interpersonal relationship could become strained where the individual was seen to be ineffective in overcoming institutional barriers. This links to the theme in Section 10.2 above in terms of the use of discretion and whether service providers are free to use initiative in the interests of their customers:

> *I think some of that is down to lack of empowerment within the systems, so people are unable to make decisions because it doesn't fit, and the round peg doesn't quite go in the round hole, and that has led to a fracture between academics and some parts of the professional services (Site B, Academic).*
>
> *I don't think that more junior people are given enough autonomy, and enough freedom to solve problems of their own volition (Site C, Professional Services).*

The way in which professional service colleagues approached problem resolution was seen by participants as a demonstration of their acceptance of ownership and their commitment to using their professional skills and expertise in the interests of the customer. Participants welcomed providers who fully engaged with the issue at hand, based their responses on a good understanding of the needs and priorities of the customer, and operated with pragmatic, constructive approaches. Particularly positive examples cited an ability to engage with both operational and strategic priorities, employing creativity and professional insights to anticipate implications, plan ahead and maintain focus on desired outcomes. Such examples converted potentially draining and difficult situations into positive, energising experiences:

> *You're more motivated if you've got a team and you feel that your team is able to problem solve, and everybody is inputting to solving the problem, everyone is committed to solving the problem, and are more motivated, more confident, able to then take advantage of new opportunities (Site C, Academic).*

Where participants were disappointed in the lack of ownership of issues by professional service colleagues, they described an absence of proactivity and initiative which could have added value:

> *The mentality of "let's see if I can find a way to help you do what you want" is sometimes not there. So it's "no you can't do that" but the follow up of "but you could do this" is not there (Site A, Academic).*
>
> *In some areas individuals are very constrained and their natural reaction is not to question the logic of something that looks inherently*

out of kilter or illogical in terms of what the business need might be or what the university's aspirations are (Site A, Professional Services).

Engagement is closely related to ownership and is also evidenced in approaches to problem resolution cited by participants. In citing examples of service relationships, participants appeared to make a judgement about the extent to which the provider had a genuine interest in the outcomes of the exchange and whether they personally cared about the service quality they delivered. In positive examples, participants spoke about strongly-engaged support colleagues as allies who were motivated to get the solution that was needed in the best interests of the department and the individual. The issue of internal service provision and customers being effectively a captive market was also mentioned, as it provided an excuse for lack of engagement with the customer's needs. Several of the poorer service relationships were judged to be the result of a lack of employee engagement on the part of the service provider, with detrimental effects on organisational performance as in the second comment below:

It would have been more effective and efficient to use somebody else who gave a damn (Site A, Professional Services).

There's a complete lack of appreciation and understanding. They don't care. That's how I feel. They don't care about what they've done to the other bits of the business (Site C, Professional Services).

Employee engagement has been theorised as an antecedent to service climate, and this is supported by the findings of this study (Bowen and Schneider 2014). Participants – especially academic staff - also saw engagement in terms of an individual service provider's willingness to engage intellectually with the subject matter and content of their department's work. Where this was in evidence, providers were perceived to be more committed to the needs of the customer, and the customer was more willing to invest in the interpersonal relationship as a result. This finding supports the theory that engagement leads to better co-operation and work performance (Purcell 2014). In contrast, where service providers are disengaged and lack the motivation to take ownership of issues, the consequences for co-operative relationships are apparent:

I think what's really important is when it comes to a complicated organisation like this, if people aren't happy in their jobs or they're not motivated they can be really obstructive by not doing things or by ignoring things (Site C, Academic).

Kahn (1990) theorised that the more employees were personally engaged in their work the better they performed, and the greater their ability to develop strong personal bonds with colleagues. The importance of a personal connection with service providers for a positive working relationship is evident in the findings and confirms the view that interpersonal relationships affect personal engagement with emotional and psychological implications (Kahn and Heaphy 2014). These findings extend this understanding of work relationships by showing how their effects also contribute to internal service quality as well as positive staff relations.

10.4 Mutuality and reciprocity

This theme emerged from the research data directly through references to reciprocal behaviour and mutuality, as well as indirectly through the descriptions of exchange relationships and how they operated in practice which instantiated reciprocity. These concepts primarily appeared as outcomes of exchange relationships through which long term collaborative partnerships with colleagues were fostered. Whilst service exchange experiences provided the opportunities for mutually beneficial relationships to be established, it was in the subsequent interpersonal relationships and ongoing work-based interactions that reciprocity took place:

> *So we were both looking for benefits from each other, so it's mutual benefit, mutual shared goal, we've got a good day-to-day working practice and they feel like part of the team (Site A, Professional Services).*

Shared goals, values and interests were found to be of critical importance in the development of effective and dynamic working relationships, supporting prior HE research which demonstrated how the congruence of goals promoted adaptability in individuals and organisations (de Zilwa 2007). Many participants viewed such alignment of interests as the basis for a positive relationship which could be productive and truly collaborative, and used phrases such as being 'on the same page', 'on the same wavelength', and sharing the same work ethic and values, such as students' interests being of prime concern:

> *We both worked hard, we were both on the same wavelength, knew what we were doing more or less, bounced ideas off each other (Site C, Academic).*
>
> *We just trust and rely on the library, and it's really clear that they're working to the same goal as us, it's really clear that they've got the*

> *student interests at heart, because the student experience is everything, so there's not really any tensions or difficulties (Site C, Academic).*

The importance of mutual interests, shared priorities and values and the acknowledgement of mutual dependency emerged strongly from the findings of this present study, confirming previous research in relationship quality (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987) and relational co-ordination (Carmeli and Gittel 2009). Findings demonstrate that the development of a personal connection in the exchange relationship allows an assessment to be made by each party about the compatibility of values, interests and level of engagement in the overall collective mission, and that this evaluation influences the extent to which an individual is prepared to invest in a relationship:

> *Fundamentally, because different styles and approaches, all of that stuff is very secondary if you share fundamental belief in the idea that the goal is why we're here, that we are working to an end. And you can even disagree about the end, but it's just that idea that work is about moving from where we are to a point in the future or in a different space or whatever that we've agreed we're going to achieve together (Site C, Professional Services).*

The findings show that a personal connection, as described in Chapter 9 Section 9.2.2 above, acts a precursor to the identification of mutuality and shared understanding, and that without the opportunity to develop such a rapport, the quality of the working relationship is compromised, as is also noted by Kaski, Niemi and Pullins (2018) in their study of business to business relationships.

Emphasising the importance of shared interests for constructive relationships, competing priorities were frequently cited as the root of difficulties with interpersonal relationships with providers. The sense that professional services colleagues had different agendas was a key element in understanding why a relationship was perceived as less successful:

> *The thing that sets off my red flashing light as it were is when I can see the people I'm dealing with are following an agenda that's their own (Site A, Academic).*

In the quote below, the participant was able to compare the motivations of two service providers and concluded that these explained the differences in relationship quality experienced:

> *I feel like our HR person helps us to achieve what we want to achieve, whereas the finance person was only focusing on what she wanted to achieve. That's important, that's really important (Site A, Professional Services).*

Participants acknowledged that colleagues may not share the same objectives and motivations, but that developing shared understandings of each other's priorities and expectations helped to align goals and to promote constructive, mutually beneficial relationships. Findings show that the development of such understanding occurred at two levels: within the service exchange, and within the interpersonal relationship. In the service exchange each party developed knowledge of the needs and priorities of the other party so that understanding was mutual. As customers, participants expected their service colleagues to understand their business and its context, but they saw a need to understand themselves the pressures on their providers so that they could frame their requests appropriately and manage their expectations, confirming the work of Stea, Pederson and Foss (2017) on relationship quality between colleagues. This mutual understanding promoted exchange efficiency as customer and provider were better able to tailor their interactions according to what they deduced to be the priorities of their colleagues:

> *For me it's all about understanding. The more you understand how a unit works or how people operate and what their pressure points are it immediately helps to cut across some of these border issues, and actually understands that everyone is trying to pull in the same direction (Site B, Professional Services).*

From a relationship quality perspective, participants reported the benefits of mutual understanding of each other's goals, agendas, values and priorities at an interpersonal level. Staff experienced instances of tolerance on both sides, such as where tight deadlines had to be imposed, because they understood that the individual was not being deliberately awkward but that such deadlines were part of their working context. Where issues had to be escalated, the mutual understanding of priorities and motivations meant that they were taken more seriously. Participants attributed the trust they felt in their service colleagues as rooted in their mutual understanding:

> *I feel quite connected to student services because I talk to them, I'm aware of them, I know what their agendas are, I know how to engage with them and I trust them (Site C, Professional Services).*

A number of participants suggested that professional service staff should be required to have direct experience in an academic department so that they better understood their customers and the core business of the institution, and how they might be affected by central decisions and practices. The depth of understanding that such work experience provided was seen to be at the heart of positive relationships with professional services colleagues, and the more negative experiences were often attributed to the absence of such professional experience:

> *I think until you've worked in a school it's quite hard to understand their needs. So quite often there's a bit of naivety or ignorance either about the issues or about how they'll be responded to, time-frames (Site B, Professional Services).*
>
> *Marketing turned our brochure into something that we just couldn't publish, because it was this moment of "you are so far away from what the academic study actually is that we don't want to put our names to that" (Site A, Academic).*

Some participants noted that those service providers with whom they had more difficulty relating to were those where interactions were infrequent or where they were distanced physically or psychologically from the academic community that they served. The development of mutual understanding helped to reduce tensions and identify common ground when one part of the university appeared to be pitched against another as a result of competing priorities, such as between central and local agendas. This quote typifies the sense of distance which can develop when there is an absence of shared goals, and provides further evidence of the different relationships which can develop depending on whether the support is locally or centrally organised (Gray 2015):

> *They don't apparently understand our agenda, my agenda, and don't seem to want to get to understand it. They feel very remote, you don't see them out here, they don't feel accessible, they live in their ivory towers a bit…you kind of get the impression that they are closed to the needs of the broader community (Site B, Professional Services).*

Mutuality was encountered in participants' attitudes and perceptions, whereas reciprocity was manifested in terms of their behaviours and actions, often stemming from these attitudes. Reciprocal behaviour was evidenced in the research data, such as in examples of information sharing, the discretionary giving and receiving of advice and the granting of favours. These behaviours were cited as an outcome of the interpersonal relationship and the result of a positive disposition towards the other person based on the exchange experience. The theory of reciprocity (Molm 2010) is strongly supported

in these findings which evidence the development of integrative bonds of trust and commitment between colleagues:

> *People can be blockers just as well as they can be enablers for you. And if you have got a good working relationship things will just happen. People will go out of their way to help you and support you (Site C, Professional Services).*

In customer-provider relationships in the internal service setting of a university, service provision is usually negotiated at service level, and so participants had limited experience of negotiated exchange (Lawler and Yoon 1993). Most of the successful exchange relationships described by participants could be framed by the individuals using discretionary behaviours, and therefore were heavily predicated on reciprocal exchange between individuals. Whilst there was often limited choice in accessing a service, the exchange relationships with individuals were experienced as structurally enabled rather than structurally induced, providing scope for individuals to invest in discretionary and reciprocal behaviours to demonstrate their commitment to the relationship, underlining existing social exchange theory (Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2006). Whilst this meant that participants were able to access higher levels of support from those with whom they had positive exchange relationships, some resentment was expressed that they were forced to employ social capital and request special favours in order to access services they needed:

> *Often you feel like you're going cap in hand to people even though it is a service that they are meant to be delivering, they don't always… they see you as a bit of an interruption to whatever else they're doing. I think that happens a lot actually (Site A, Professional Services).*

> *At the moment if you ask anyone to do anything it's like you're asking for a super personal favour. But first of all you're paid by the university so get on with it. So you always have this eggshell thing when you're asking for something, you think "can I ask them, will they do it? Will they bite my head off?" (Site B, Academic).*

Participants described reciprocity in both direct and indirect exchange, and their experiences of it as both givers and receivers of reciprocal acts. Indirect social exchanges were described when participants spoke of doing favours without an expectation of a direct return, rather seeing their generosity as contributing to the strength of the wider community which they would themselves benefit from as part of networked exchange relationships. Such instances of generalised reciprocity confirmed

the link between reciprocal behaviours and the development of group-oriented co-operation and organisational citizenship behaviours (Simpson et al. 2018). The social exchange network concept (Cook 2005; Arnould and Rose 2016) is also confirmed empirically in this study, with indirect exchange identified as a feature of large social networks within complex organisational structures:

> *You've got proper working relationships with people that you can go to, they can go to you, and that has its downsides as then you get called into meetings as you're known as someone that will help and be friendly, and I do suffer from that. But that's part of the business as we all gain from that (Site C, Academic).*

In particular, participants relied on the goodwill of those with whom they had developed reciprocal relationships in social and informal networks to help them navigate professional support service structures and locate the support they needed, reflecting the findings of Ehrhart et al. (2011). Whilst participants recognised the value they gained from such relationships, it was also noted that this put newer staff at a disadvantage, as it took time to develop and access such networks:

> *I think the institutional knowledge is really critical, and when you've been here a long time you know who to go to to get things done. But it shouldn't be like that – you shouldn't have to have 30 years of service to know who to go to, and to jump the queue because you know somebody, but you have to do that (Site C, Academic).*

Affect-based reciprocity (Lawler 2001) was evident in the research data, as participants spoke of a sense of personal connection, friendship and goodwill towards those with whom they had positive relationships, demonstrating how personal characteristics influence interpersonal relationships (Pulles and Hartman 2017). Reciprocity provided the basis for co-operation and collaborative partnerships between different parts of the university's structure, and the resulting relationships promoted trust and commitment between colleagues in a virtuous circle of reciprocal behaviours (Sultan and Wong 2013):

> *Because you want to help people, and if you want to help people that you like and they like you there's much more goodwill and attempt to find a workaround or some way of working through a problem (Site A, Professional Services).*

> *We're all busy but I will invest more time in the people I know and trust, and be willing to give them that extra half an hour (Site C, Professional Services).*

Reciprocity, mutuality and shared understanding are evidenced in this study as particularly significant elements which foster long-term, ongoing, productive relationships in an internal service setting. These findings clearly demonstrate the shared knowledge, common goals and mutual respect that relational co-ordination requires (Gittell 2002), and their importance in establishing effective working relationships. This theme also speaks to the high levels of interdependence within HE organisational contexts which generates an expectation amongst participants that colleagues ought to be 'pulling in same direction' in what were described as symbiotic relationships. Relationship quality literature is limited in addressing this theme in internal service relationships, perhaps due to it being focused predominantly on external or buyer-seller exchange where this element may have more limited implications, but these findings contribute to this literature by evidencing the critical role of reciprocity and mutuality in internal service provision.

10.5 Value co-creation and co-operation

The theme of value co-creation draws together elements of all the preceding thematic overviews (Sections 10.1 to 10.4) to present the end result of co-operative behaviours: the creation of value for the organisation. The concept of value co-creation, as explained in Chapter 3 Section 3.1.3, rests on collaborative processes in service exchange, and this study provides empirical evidence of the extent to which the quality of interdependent relationships influences the value derived from them. Participants have contributed rich data that illustrates how the integration of customer and provider resources leads to long-term, productive relationships that deliver significant value to them as individuals as well as to their institutions. These findings support earlier service research (e.g. Ostrom et al. 2015; Gronroos, 2011) and additionally provide tangible examples from an internal service perspective which has not previously been examined from a relationship quality approach. A number of studies have explored co-operation and value co-creation in business to business exchange relationships (Lussier and Hall 2018; Lyons and Brennan 2019; Delpechitre, Beeler-Connelly and Chaker 2018) but the phenomenon has not been researched in an internal service context. In HE literature, value co-creation has only been investigated from the point of view of the student as beneficiary (e.g. Dollinger, Lodge and Coates 2018).

Participants did not use the term 'value co-creation', but their descriptions of productive working relationships compellingly evidenced this concept. The generation of ideas,

innovative and adaptive approaches, and creative solutions to problems were all cited as outcomes of collaborative ways of working:

> *We moved away from like 'this is our plan, this is your plan' it was developing activities together, trying out activities, some of which worked some of which didn't, and really thinking about how we put things together (Site A, Professional Services).*

Participants noted that they were able to achieve objectives in collaboration with colleagues which they could not have done alone, and frequently referred to complimentary skillsets and feelings of empowerment resulting from the pooling of resources with their colleagues:

> *We were able to work together to wring the maximum learning out of the experience. So he had strong expertise, was a very good communicator, he was able to spend the time, he had a similar mind set but was equally able to challenge some of my assumptions and overcome some of my areas of ignorance by complementary knowledge (Site A, Professional Services).*
>
> *I don't believe that was down to me, I believe we got a conclusion because it was down to the relationship that I had with this person and that we together wanted a conclusion (Site B, Professional Services).*
>
> *We have got I'm sure better results than we would have done if I'd just gone in on my own or if she hadn't felt able to give that advice (Site B, Professional Services).*

In this last comment, the participant alludes to the confidence which is experienced by both parties in a positive working relationship which fosters productive interactions. Such collaboration grounded in trusted relationships enabled each party to contribute their full range of skills, knowledge and experience, to share concerns and risks openly and to generate maximum value from the exchange.

The service ecosystem theory expounded by Vargo and Lusch (2011, 2017), which emphasises interdependencies and the role of co-operation and institutional co-ordination in deriving value from service exchange relationships, is substantiated in these findings. Likewise, these findings confirm the theory that when high levels of interdependence exist, the need for co-operation - communication, information sharing and collaboration - is equally high (Lintz 2008). Evidence from this study corroborates this view, particularly through illustrations of the constraining influence of poor

relationships on co-operative behaviours. Participants were more likely to employ control measures to manage risk and to withhold co-operation when they were less confident in the service relationship, and this could in turn affect other interdependent relationships.

Value co-creation is theorised as a social construction and these findings attest to the influence of social structures and practices in generating value through service exchange (Edvardsson, Tronvoll and Gruber 2011). An examination of the data for positive relationship outcomes indicated that the most influential elements were connected with relationship quality characteristics and not service quality characteristics. Antecedents to value co-creation included trust, reciprocity, respect, shared interests and understanding, and effective and honest communication. The value derived from such relationships was experienced at an individual level such as in personal efficacy, motivation and productivity, and at an organisational level such as in research funding success and improvements in the student experience. The contribution of this present research to understandings of value co-creation in internal service settings is the provision of empirical examples of what value means to university staff in their internal exchange relationships.

Co-operation and the development of effective collaborations with colleagues are outcomes generated from high quality working relationships, and appreciated by participants. Such ways of working connected participants into the wider university community and encouraged a sense of a collective endeavour in which all parties could play their part:

> *There is a sense of being able to work as a team, not within your operational unit but genuinely across office boundaries (Site A, Professional Services).*
>
> *You feel sort of more of a kind of corporate belonging, if that makes sense… that we're all part of the same organisation (Site A, Professional Services).*

This finding illustrates the work of Kahn and Heaphy (2014) by confirming how relational contexts can shape individual engagement within an organisation.

A number of participants referred to such relationships as partnerships as a result of the equal balance of power, mutual respect and shared concern to address challenges. These strong interpersonal relationships also helped to break down perceived barriers

between academic and administrative colleagues confirming earlier findings that co-operative partnerships between these two staff groups are needed in order to handle institutional challenges (Gray 2015; Mcinnis 1998). However, close proximity or the embedding of service provision within academic structures to signify co-operative intentions could be critical in fostering trust and enhancing collaborative exchange relationships. Where trust was absent or compromised, participants felt less able to engage in collaborative behaviours and less willing to take risks in sharing knowledge and airing concerns, reducing opportunities for value co-creation:

> *If people don't have confidence or trust in the infrastructure, then that will have a negative impact upon the way that they want to get involved, or participate or feel alienated, disengaged, and not feel part of the academic community (Site C, Academic).*

These findings illustrate how value co-creation is manifested in internal service provision, and underscore the significance of relationship quality and trust in fostering conducive conditions for co-operation between colleagues which yield benefits for both internal and external customers.

Chapter summary

This chapter has explored how customer perceptions of service quality are influenced by the quality of the interpersonal relationship in the internal service exchange. In taking a thematic approach, the dynamics of these relationships between colleagues are identified in both positive and negative examples. The next chapter examines the consequences of these relationship dynamics and provides evidence of tangible costs and benefits which are the outcomes of internal service relationships.

CHAPTER 11: OUTCOMES OF INTERNAL SERVICE QUALITY

This chapter examines the outcomes of internal service quality from the point of view of the internal customer, as well as for the institution as a whole. Having established in Chapter 10 that relationship quality has a significant bearing on perceptions of service quality, this chapter focuses on how customers then respond, and therefore addresses the third research question:

> *RQ3: How does relationship quality affect the customer's attitudes, behaviours and actions?*

Outcomes of service exchange relationships are evidenced in the data through their effects on individual participants in terms of their attitudes, behaviours and actions. Table 11.1 shows how future engagement with service providers is influenced by service and relationship experiences, and indicates the ways in which these ongoing relationships play out, with positive and negative implications.

Table 11.1: Outcomes and their effects on service customers

Attitudes	*Behaviours*	*Actions*
• Goodwill • Commitment • Personal connection • Trust • Respect • Enjoyment • Frustration • Scepticism • Emotion • Motivation / demotivation • Identification • Understanding • Tolerance	• Honesty • Reciprocity • Tension • Professionalism • Ownership • Assertiveness • Responsiveness • Communication • Engagement • Flexibility • Enabling behaviours • Rapport	<u>Positive</u> • Learning • Collaboration • Advice • Favours • Value co-creation • Information sharing • Creativity and innovation • Problem resolution • Initiative <u>Negative</u> • Chasing • Troubleshooting • Avoidance • Alternative means • Escalation • Do-it-yourself • Complaints

Future use intentions is an indicator of service exchange outcomes (Roberts, Varki and Brodie 2003), and participants were asked whether the experiences they recounted had

affected their future engagement with those services. In both positive and negative service exchange relationships, participants overwhelmingly stated that their subsequent engagement with those services would be influenced by their experience, both in terms of whether they asked for help again, and the way in which they would approach the service if they did. The consequences of these outcomes at individual and institutional level are evident in the research data and are presented in sections 11.1 and 11.2 below.

Service quality literature on exchange outcomes focuses on the implications for customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Cronin and Taylor 1992), or performance and profitability on the part of the provider (Zhang et al. 2016; Lussier and Hall 2018), but does not describe the responses of internal customers as listed in Table 11.1. Focusing on internal service exchange, this study adds to the literature by examining the outcomes of internal service quality in the subsequent attitudes, behaviours and actions of internal customers, to better understand what people actually do in practice as a consequence of the quality of their working relationships with service providers. By articulating these outcomes in terms of the costs and benefits generated, this chapter illustrates why the quality of internal service relationships matter.

11.1 Benefits of positive service exchange relationships

Discussed in detail in Chapter 10, the findings of this study demonstrate that high quality relationships generate value co-creation and co-operative behaviours, enable problem-resolution and innovation, promote efficiency and performance, and help staff to operate effectively in large bureaucratic structures. These discoveries are consistent with relationship quality literature (Carmeli and Gittel 2009; Colbert, Bono and Purvanova 2016) and extend the insights into the internal exchange relationship. Some of the most compelling examples cited by participants combined a number of these elements to deliver significant benefits for the customer and the institution. This section examines some of the longer-term benefits experienced by participants.

Trust

Trust was identified by participants as a vital component in effective working relationships, echoing Colquitt, Scott and Lepine (2007), and this was evidenced in both positive and negative relationship examples. Where participants spoke positively about long-term co-operative relationships, trust was frequently mentioned as the basis for greater confidence in engaging fully and honestly across departmental boundaries:

> *We worked really constructively together, it was something around trust I think, and knowing that the other party understood where I was going and vice versa…like 'close your ears now, I'm going to tell you this but don't retain it'. It was trust, that's what it boiled down to (Site B, Professional Services).*

Trust was referred to by many participants as an outcome of mutual understanding and of prior experience of productive working relationships. It sustained long-term relationships and promoted exchange efficiency, allowing participants to act more decisively and effectively in their own roles because they had confidence in the support, motivations and expertise of their colleagues. Likewise, such strong, trusting relationships enabled participants to seek expert advice more readily and expose themselves to the reputational risk inherent in asking for help, confirming the work of Das and Teng (2004). Several participants noted that access to valued advice had become possible once a positive working relationship had been established, and that without such a bond they would not have felt able to ask the questions they needed to:

> *With people that you have a positive relationship with it's a delight to talk to them, I can share difficulties with them more readily, I can confess my own shortcomings with them more readily, and they'll work with me to help there (Site C, Professional Services).*

Learning opportunities

Positive working relationships with professional services colleagues provided participants with opportunities to learn specialist knowledge from service providers which improved their career prospects, as in this example:

> *She was able to teach me stuff in a way that I could then use to educate colleagues in the school about some of the finer points of university finances, and if I hadn't had that I wouldn't be where I am now, because certainly my level of understanding of the finances wouldn't be where it is now (Site B, Professional Services).*

The openness, shared goals and sense of being part of a wider community of practice which stemmed from having a network of trusted colleagues fostered a learning outlook and a willingness to learn from experience:

> *I think it enhances you professionally, because people come up with ideas that you may not have thought about, so it improves your skills…and I think having those different points of view are really important to stop you being siloed (Site C, Professional Services).*

These findings confirm the importance of positive interpersonal relationships for learning to take place, as they enable individuals to admit to deficiencies and to work constructively on improving services and skills, from both the customer and provider perspective, as outlined by Carmeli and Gittel (2009). They also underline the work of Inkpen and Curral (2004) in recognising the role of trust in producing the conditions for learning to take place between collaborating partners.

Staff relations

Positive working relationships increased participants' favourable attitudes and behaviours towards professional services staff, leading to higher service expectations, greater respect for colleagues' contributions, and increased motivation and commitment to the institution. These outcomes increased positive regard towards future use of professional services, and ensured that subsequent service engagement provided access to the benefits of high quality service relationships. These outcomes also produced important benefits for staff wellbeing and job satisfaction, as noted in these examples:

> *In terms of wellbeing, it makes a happier community, a happier workplace (Site B, Academic).*
>
> *If you've got a positive working relationship, everybody is happier, everybody wants to come to work and feels that they're going to solve the problems in their work, they feel supported and that they've got back-up, and so that's good for everybody's health and wellbeing which is so important. The minute you lose that you think 'I don't want to go to work, I'm not feeling very well, I feel a bit ill I better stay off today' (Site C, Academic).*
>
> *You come away with a greater sense of satisfaction, feeling that you haven't wasted time, so you feel more personally satisfied and fulfilled (Site C, Professional Services).*

Establishing a link with a trusted colleague could lead to a service provider being seen as the 'go-to person' and source of respected advice, in that the exchange efficiency gleaned from the personal connection drives the customer to approach that individual instead of another provider:

> *That is where some of these personal relationships become really important, that actually there are people who I know and trust within those services who I will go to (Site B, Academic).*

Participants acknowledged that their 'go-to person' was not always the right person to

approach and that it could be detrimental to that individual's workload:

> *You'll get the blocking over here and you'll just ring [professional service colleague] because she'll sort it out. And we all do it, we latch on to people who can do these things, and we know this isn't the most efficient way, but you do it because you're getting something (Site C, Professional Services).*

If a 'go-to person' couldn't help personally they would signpost to the correct route, and help customers to navigate organisational structures and find the support they seek, as in this example:

> *There will be times in a complex organisation like this, you're not sure who to turn to for a specific piece of advice, but and this may or may not be their role, but you will sometimes go to these people and say 'this isn't yours but can you at least direct me to who it is' (Site B, Academic).*

These professional service colleagues were therefore an important source of institutional intelligence. The downside of such ways of working was identified by two participants, who worried that when institutional memory was invested in key individuals then there were increased negative consequences if those people left the university, as their ways of working and institutional knowledge were not necessarily written down.

Reciprocity

Strong working relationships and personal connections increased goodwill on both sides, providing access to favours and reciprocal behaviours, and a greater willingness to work collaboratively, to consult, and to involve the service provider at early stages of a project:

> *People feel inclined to go the extra mile, which is of course how the whole place runs - the place runs on goodwill (Site A, Academic).*

As discussed in Chapter 10 Section 10.4, positive working relationships produced generalised reciprocity in the form of organisational citizenship behaviours, in that participants referred to helping on interview panels, contributing to pilot studies for new services, and involvement in strategy development and departmental reviews in other parts of the institution, as a result of co-operative relationships established through service exchange experiences. Reciprocity involving individuals was also cited as an outcome of positive relationships, with participants recognising the cycle of investment and return in productive exchange relationships, reflecting the work of Molm, Whitham

and Melamed (2012). Several participants were explicit that whilst they understood this, they did not themselves engage in reciprocal behaviours as a calculated approach but rather because they wished to help a colleague with whom they had a personal connection:

> *I work hard at those relationships and I always have. I think they are worth investment. They are worth investment but I don't do it because of having rationalised the come-back. They are just worth investment because it's the right way to behave with people (Site B, Academic).*

Performance

The principal benefits in terms of individual performance were experienced as personal efficacy and empowerment, with an ability to perform better in their own roles and responsibilities, and efficiency such that more time could be spent on other priorities as a result. The impact on staff productivity at institutional level can be quantified in terms of staff time and job performance. In positive relationship examples, participants pointed to ease of contact and ready access to trusted support and advice on which they could depend, as well as a confidence that the service could be relied on in future. This exchange efficiency benefitted from enhanced knowledge and understanding on both sides and facilitated more open, informal communications, sometimes allowing sensitive issues to be dealt with more effectively:

> *It's seamless and it flows, and you feel supported and you understand what people are asking from you, and it gets done – the job gets done quickly (Site A, Professional Services).*

Participants also recorded the benefits of positive working relationships on their external contacts, with examples covering student recruitment and research funding bodies, where successful interactions yielded both financial and reputational results, as in this example:

> *You can literally quantify [the benefits], because you are talking millions of pounds, millions. It was entirely as a result of those positive relationships because I've worked on grants with other people and so I've seen the difference. And you can see the difference between what will be a successful grant or a successful enterprise and one which won't (Site A, Academic).*

These findings therefore substantiate and extend the works of Reynoso and Moores (1995) and Schneider and Bowen (2019) by providing evidence of the link between internal and external service quality and performance.

11.2 Consequences of negative service exchange relationships

When work relationships with professional services staff were described by participants as less effective, the consequences were experienced at personal and institutional levels. Whilst many of these outcomes produced indirect effects on performance, they were nonetheless experienced as tangible costs. A key finding from the data is that these negative consequences could be experienced when an interpersonal relationship was absent, not just when the relationship was actively hostile. Examples of these circumstances are provided in Chapter 9 Section 9.1.2, where the service delivery model excludes the possibility of an interpersonal relationship between customer and provider.

Mitigating behaviours

When participants experienced difficult service relationships, their attitudes were affected in that expectations were revised downwards, they became frustrated by or resigned to poor quality service, or they became sceptical and wary when forced to access such support in future. When they did so, it was with reluctance and low expectations, and any advice or information provided would be double-checked because of a lack of confidence in the quality of the provider's work:

> *You do what's needed, but maybe with some trepidation, or with a heavy heart, thinking 'how is this going to go, is anyone going to listen, is this going to get anywhere?' So it does have an effect in the sense of impending doom (Site C, Academic).*

When some participants experienced poor relationships with service providers they would adjust their behaviours in response, to mitigate the perceived risks. The most frequently cited response to negative working relationships was assertiveness, and participants felt that their personal resilience was tested at such times, and that they paid a personal price. For example, they were prepared to escalate issues to more senior colleagues but felt conflicted about doing so and were resentful that they should have to go to those lengths in order to achieve the support they needed:

> *It makes you feel that you have to be really aggressive in order to get A an answer and B the answer you want. And I've always worked, personally in a professional capacity, on trying to have good*

> *professional relationships with other professional services, because I think if you go and start sending stroppy emails all over then nobody wants to deal with you, so I don't like doing that, but sometimes you get to the point where you have no choice. It forces you to be the bad guy, and I don't like doing that (Site A, Professional Services).*

Some participants reported consciously making efforts to maintain their own professionalism in the face of difficult relationships, despite intense frustration. The impact on the reputation of services and the university was also noted, including the long-term consequences for other colleagues, both in provider and customer roles:

> *You tell people about your negative experiences, and if people have had a partial negative experience it will be amplified by mine, and then as a result their reputation will become more and more tarnished (Site C, Professional Services).*
>
> *As a Russell Group university we work on that reputation a lot, we use that label fairly heavily, and I think it should inspire current and prospective students in terms of the quality label, but I'm worried we don't actually live up to that any more (Site B, Academic).*

Emotional outcomes and wellbeing

Some participants talked about bracing themselves for interaction in difficult relationships, noting the personal emotional costs. From the relationship quality perspective, by far the largest effect of poor relationships on participants was emotional. They reported negative emotions such as frustration, anger, disappointment, resentment, irritation, misery, disenchantment, and a sense of disempowerment. In some cases these emotional responses led to raised stress levels which had detrimental effects on health and wellbeing for those participants:

> *If I come home after a poor day because of poor relationships at work, my interaction with the family is non-existent, I can't carry through, I can't cope with it, so I isolate…So I think negative relationships I would say quite convincingly have terrible impact on my well-being, health and personal life, because I come home and I do the same, I just carry on the day never finishes because I'm not able to put it to bed, and come to terms with the negativity of the day (Site C, Academic).*

Such effects on an individual's emotional state of mind were also linked to lower levels of trust between colleagues and reduced tolerance of service failings. Participants expressed their exasperation with poor relationships as 'banging your head against a brick wall', and found such interactions exhausting and demotivating on a personal level,

as well as frustrating professionally. When negative experiences of this nature were encountered as a regular feature in their working life, participants spoke about being demoralised and their commitment to the institution was affected as a result:

> *It's very easy to slip into a mind-set where you know, you look elsewhere, you think the grass is greener. I think you can get a change of mood very quickly which can be difficult to shake off if you're working on a project or in an area where that is a consistent feature (Site A, Professional Services).*

Innovation

Academic participants in particular emphasised detrimental effects on innovation, in that regularly encountering difficult relationships had a dampening effect on creativity and led to wasted opportunities. A number of participants remarked that if they encountered difficulties in accessing support for day-to-day needs, then they were less likely to commit energy and time to more strategic or innovative ideas because of the expectation that they would be unsupported in doing so, and it would therefore require too much personal effort and resource. In a university setting which demands innovation in research, scholarship and student experience, a sense of being compromised in these areas was especially worrying to these participants:

> *It brings you down to a level of thinking that is very, very low, and it's very difficult to elevate again to innovative thinking, creative thought. So academic knowledge discovery is brought down several times a day every day to a very, very low level. So it's not just the time, it's this shift that's in your mind, that on a daily basis you have to deal with things you shouldn't (Site C, Academic).*

Productivity and value for money

In terms of service quality outcomes, the effects of negative relationships were very clearly evidenced in the data. When faced with a poor service relationship, participants subsequently chose different courses of action as a result of negative experiences in the past. Some would simply do the work themselves if they had the ability to do so because it was easier than asking for help, whilst some avoided the service entirely or found alternative means or individuals instead. Taking such actions result in reduced productivity, increased workload and lower levels of personal efficacy, a factor felt keenly by professional services participants who pride themselves on getting things done. For example, one participant at Site C estimated that around 60% of her time was spent chasing up after poor support, and that the drain on her time and energy had a significant

impact on her ability to do her job. Such costs can be quantified in terms of the value of staff time lost and the wasted salary costs. Professional services participants mentioned escalation more frequently, perhaps as a consequence of their status within the institution and their greater reliance on chains of command through their Head of Department.

The outcomes described above have consequences for the value for money of internal service provision: if an institution is funding an internal service which staff are avoiding then this is not cost-effective. If senior managers are required to resolve service issues which have been escalated to them on a regular basis, there is a cost to the institution in terms of management time and resource. These findings provide concrete evidence of the consequences for institutional effectiveness of internal service quality, as proposed by Hogreve et al. (2016) and Schneider and Bowen (2019).

Effects on institutional performance

Whilst the majority of negative consequences were felt in the internal operation and resourcing of the institution, the data also evidences some circumstances where service failings had had financial consequences and external customers had been affected. Examples were given at Sites B and C where reductions in student intake were directly attributed by the participants to centralised marketing and student recruitment services which had failed to engage with external customers effectively. The implications of reduced student numbers were experienced at departmental level, with one Head of Department concerned that staff redundancies in the school would need to take place as a result of the reduced fee income. What irked such participants most was the lack of accountability for the impact of service failings, and the absence of tangible consequences for the services which were responsible. As Heads of Department, they saw themselves as being held personally accountable for the financial effects of service failings which were outside their control, a situation which they found unacceptable.

Consequences were also experienced through effects on student satisfaction and the quality of the student experience on campus, as student-facing staff were constrained in delivering support to students as a result of shortcomings in the internal services they received from colleagues, such as in this example:

> *Sometimes people who aren't student facing or who haven't worked in the school have a different understanding of things, and are very*

> *bound by processes. But it's very different when you're at the front-end, and you can absolutely see the end point is a huge queue of disgruntled students and a load of complaints winging its way in, and you just cannot get the message through, no matter how you say it, how you write it, there's just a complete mismatch in communication and style of working, and they probably think we are absolute pains (Site B, Professional Services).*

Such outcomes have the potential to negatively influence institutional performance in student satisfaction measures which feed into the Teaching Excellence Framework and positioning in league tables, which could subsequently affect student recruitment and institutional reputation.

Unlike exchange relationships in buyer-seller contexts, these outcomes in internal service exchange are more difficult to quantify at a business performance level (Hogreve et al. 2016). However, examples were provided by participants in which financial consequences could be identified as a result of the internal service exchange, in terms of financial performance and value for money of investment in services (Palmatier et al. 2006). There were also tangible consequences identified in terms of work performance of individuals and teams, as service exchange influenced efficiency and efficacy within the organisation.

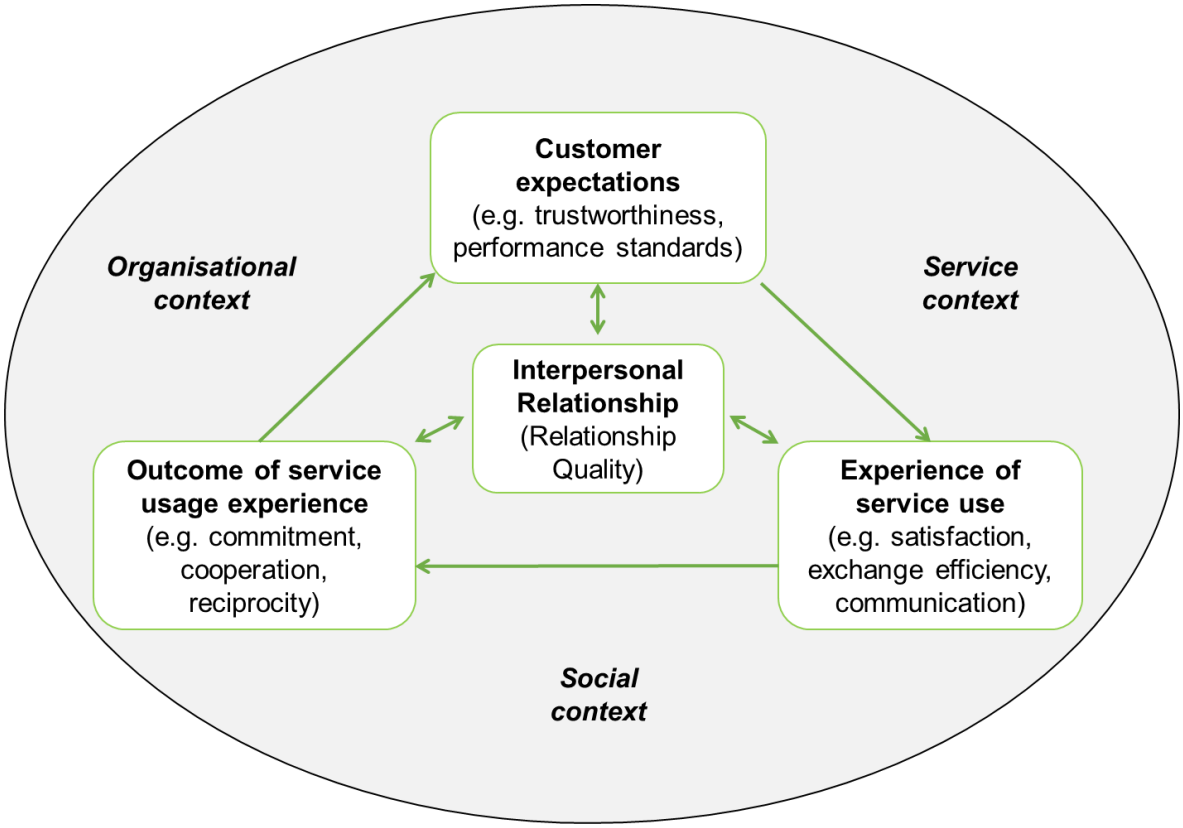
Chapter summary

This chapter focused on the outcomes of internal service exchange relationships, to provide evidence of the positive and negative consequences of internal service quality and the workplace relationships through which these interactions take place. Findings testify to the very real impact at both individual and institutional level of internal exchange relationships, through effects on customers' long-term attitudes, behaviours and actions. Examination of the data on the outcomes of interpersonal relationships provides powerful evidence of the costs of poor relationships and the value of strong relationships in the HE workplace.

CHAPTER 12: RELEVANCE FOR CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To conclude Part Three, this chapter assesses the extent to which the findings detailed in Chapters 8 to 11 correspond to the conceptual framework underpinning this study, taking the service exchange, the interpersonal relationship and the contextual backdrop in turn. Following this evaluation, a revised version of the conceptual model is provided which incorporates key elements of the research findings.

Figure 12.1: Conceptual framework of the internal service exchange relationship (as presented in Chapter 5).



(Source: Author)

12.1 Service exchange

The framework proposed a circular process in the service exchange on the part of the customer, moving from service expectations, to exchange experiences and through to service outcomes which inform future use and adjusted expectations. Participants' views did support this conceptualisation at each stage, and confirmed the model's prediction

that the interpersonal relationship between provider and customer had significant scope to determine the effectiveness of the service exchange throughout the process, in both positive and negative ways. Contextual factors were also proven to affect service exchange but these could be mitigated by strong interpersonal relationships.

Customer expectations were found to operate as a benchmark against which subsequent service experiences were judged, and when expectations were met participants had a more positive perception of the service exchange relationship, in keeping with service quality theory (Parasuraman 1994; Gronroos 2011). Broadly, these expectations were consistent with current understandings, but the extent to which participants cited clarity as a key expectation was noteworthy as this does not have the same emphasis in service exchange literature. This may relate to the complexity of the university context as described by Stensaker (2018) and Veles, Carter and Boon (2018). For example, participants' experiences of accessing professional services illustrated the difficulties of navigating large, complex organisational structures and of engaging with frequently changing service models and bureaucratic processes. It is perhaps therefore unsurprising that clarity of service offer, who to go to for what and how to access support should be a priority for customers.

In the service experience, where participants had a personal connection and a good understanding of their provider, they were prepared to be more lenient and tolerant of service deficiencies, confirming the theory that customer expectations operate as a zone of tolerance (Sivakumar, Li and Dong 2014). However, this tolerance was achieved as a result of the interpersonal relationship, demonstrating the influence that this connection had over service experience and quality perceptions. Communication was frequently cited as a mechanism through which expectations were managed, and whether or not communication was effective had a profound effect on the developing interpersonal relationship. Communication fostered positive exchanges and promoted exchange efficiency and the development of relationship norms, but could also be an indicator of relationship strength, in that participants were more willing to share information, advice and problems when they trusted the individual provider.

Communication was influenced by structural and contextual conditions such as co-location, but could also be deployed effectively to mitigate problems in these areas, such that the interpersonal relationship could prevail over unhelpful service exchange

structures. Individual competence and the personal connection were also key elements in concert with effective communication in delivering positive service exchange experiences. In less positive examples, participants frequently cited communication difficulties and ensuing frustrations which stemmed from poor relationships or the absence of a relationship with an individual service provider as a result of the service delivery model. The difficulties in establishing interpersonal relationships with service providers resulting from impersonal service models was raised by participants across all three sites, with the absence of a personal relationship hindering communication efforts.

As proposed by the conceptual model, outcomes of service use and the quality of the customer's experience directly affected subsequent engagement with services, as described in Chapter 8. These outcomes generated benefits and costs at individual and institutional levels, and were discussed in Chapter 11.

12.2 The interpersonal relationship

The findings from this study illustrate core concepts in relationship quality theory as positioned at the centre of the model, and test these in an internal service setting. The experiences and reflections of participants strongly underline the significance of the interpersonal relationship in internal service exchange and evidence the ways in which the relationship affects and is affected by each stage of the service exchange – expectations, experience and outcomes. Relationship quality as a multi-dimensional, dynamic concept is supported by findings which demonstrate how perceptions of relationship quality affect attitudes, behaviours and actions of service users, contributing to relational exchange outcomes. Findings also provide support for relationship quality theory in demonstrating how contextual, situational and interpersonal factors influence the exchange relationship (e.g. Omilion-Hodges and Baker 2013; Naude and Buttle 2000) and the holistic approach to understanding the interplay between these elements supports the service eco-system concept (Vargo and Lusch 2011).

The importance of relational ways of working which can adapt to changing circumstances of the HE sector is confirmed (Whitchurch and Gordon 2013), as is the significance of relationship quality in co-operation between service providers and customers (Palmatier et al. 2006). The dimensions of relationship quality most prevalent in theoretical contributions (trust, satisfaction, commitment and reciprocity) were evident in the findings but their influence was experienced in particular ways in the context of this research.

The findings of this research also emphasised the significance of mutuality and shared understandings and values, in a way not seen in relationship quality theory. This phenomenon may therefore be particular to the exchange relationship in an internal service setting, as parties would ultimately be working towards common organisational interests and hence there is a greater expectation of common ground as a basis for collaboration than might be seen in an external service context.

Trust was described by participants most frequently as an outcome of service exchange relationships, not as an antecedent, although once established it would inform future service exchange encounters and promoted exchange efficiency and relationship quality in the longer term. In contrast to relationship quality theory, satisfaction was not articulated as a driver of relationship quality, but could be identified in participants' reflections on whether a service had met their expectations, and along with competence provided a base-level assessment of service quality and was a necessary condition for a relationship to develop (Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990). Reciprocity, on the other hand, was a strong relationship driver that emerged from positive exchange experiences and that supported the development of co-operation and collaboration. In combination with trust and commitment, reciprocity enabled value co-creation and supported organisational performance beyond the individual service exchange relationship.

Commitment was difficult to isolate as a concept in an internal service setting as use of services was often mandatory, but low commitment levels were identified in negative relationships where participants avoided service providers or found alternative means to address their needs. Conversely, in positive relationships participants spoke of their commitment in terms of having 'go-to contacts' who would be approached in preference to other providers. Cognitive assessments of commitment were in greater evidence in negative experiences, whereas affective commitment resulted from more positive experiences. This finding extends social exchange theory (e.g. Molm, Takahashi and Peterson 2000) which distinguishes between the two types of commitment, but does not demonstrate the link between positive and negative exchange experiences and the type of commitment in the way this present research has been able to do.

This research uncovered the role of emotions in internal service exchange relationships, and findings support the theory that emotions influence behaviours and attitudes in an exchange relationship, and that the effects are stronger in relational exchange than

transactional exchange (Lawler 2001). There were numerous examples cited by participants which substantiated the existence of 'companionships of misery' and the phenomenon of negative interdependence as a feature of internal service provision (Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2006). Likewise, tensions between academic and professional services staff were apparent and evidenced, supporting earlier studies (Dobson and Conway 2003; Mcinnis 1998; Szekeres 2006). Findings also endorse earlier findings that tensions between professional services staff groups can emerge when staff from one function sense that weaker performers are 'letting the side down' (Small 2008).

The findings equally provide copious evidence of the beneficial outcomes of relational cohesion, where the relationship is valued for itself, and emotional uplift is derived from the satisfaction of a positive working relationship and successful co-operation (Lawler and Yoon 1996). One participant captured this in noting that 'dynamism is pleasurable' and others explained how good relationships fostered an 'esprit de corps' within their wider network. Participants provided compelling examples of the overwhelmingly positive results of high-quality relationships with colleagues which generated benefits beyond the service exchange relationship and contributed to institutional commitment, motivation, job satisfaction, personal wellbeing and work performance:

> *One of the good things about working here is you're working with really bright people, really enthusiastic people, really dedicated people, and those sort of people really make you feel lively and youthful, if you like. It really gives you a lot of energy (Site A, Professional Services).*

Participants openly recognised the conscious and sub-conscious effort that they made in developing effective working relationships, because they valued the benefits they could yield. Prior (2016) found that significant investment of personal resources was required by service providers to foster relationship quality, and this research provides evidence to show that this is also the case from a customer perspective. The customer expectations uncovered in this research also confirms the demands on individual service providers to invest in interpersonal relationships with those they support.

These findings illustrate clear and tangible differences between positive and negative relationship experiences and the outcomes they produce, underlining the role of the interpersonal relationship in effective internal service provision.

12.3 Contextual backdrop

Evidence of the influence of organisational, service and social contexts on service exchange relationships was clearly visible in the research data, supporting service quality theories which acknowledge the influence of context (e.g. Edvardsson, Skalen and Tronvoll 2012; Akaka, Vargo and Lusch 2013). Participants viewed their work relationships against the backdrop of organisational and operational challenges, and their understanding of constraints experienced by their colleagues mitigated negative perceptions of service quality to a certain extent. Positive interpersonal relationships could also overcome institutional obstacles and complexities as individuals drew on their personal networks to navigate institutional complexities.

Analysis of the research data revealed the interplay between contextual factors and the experience of service exchange relationships. By exploring participants' experiences of both positive and negative relationships and examining the interpersonal and situational conditions as in Figure 9.2 in Chapter 9 above, findings show that different factors are implicated in different quality experiences. This indicates that the particular combination of contextual conditions and interpersonal interactions influences perceptions of relationship quality, rather than any one factor in isolation.

Participants provided evidence of the ways in which interpersonal relationships could overcome organisational constraints, but no examples were given in which individual relationship difficulties were overcome by organisational factors. This demonstrates that the interplay between these factors operates primarily in one direction in the exchange relationship. Findings also suggest that certain elements are generative and actively propagate relationship quality whilst others do not in themselves create the conditions but instead shield relationships from negative influences in their wider context. For instance, personal networks were seen as instrumental in promoting co-operation, whilst co-location provided opportunities to negate tensions between staff groups but did not on its own produce high quality relationships.

Participants did refer to wider contextual conditions in higher education such as the external regulatory environment, bureaucratic complexity and the diversity of cultures, goals and audiences, acknowledging the ways in which these had the potential to cause tension in working relationships and illustrating prior HE sector research (e.g. Sporn 1996). The role of the institution in providing the conditions for co-operative behaviours

to be enacted as theorised by Vargo and Lusch (2016) was supported in these findings. Centralisation, co-location, and service delivery models were all identified as key factors in the development of exchange relationships which could be inhibited or promoted as a result, depending on the circumstances. This supports the premise that service exchange has the potential to be highly relational and that whilst the individual characteristics of relationships are significant, they cannot be understood separately from the organisational context in which they operate.

12.4 Revised conceptual framework

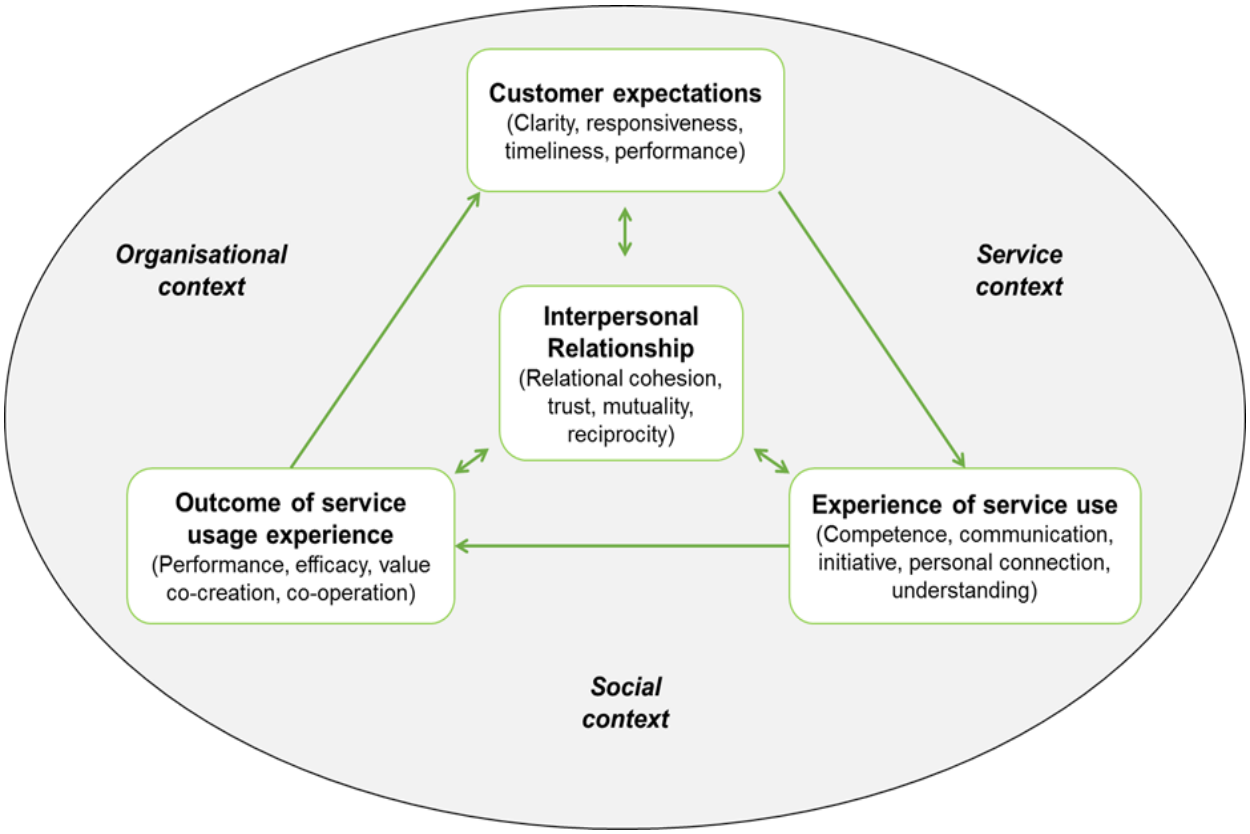
The original conceptual framework presented in Chapter 5 drew on theoretical concepts presented in relationship quality, trust and social exchange literature. The research findings presented in this chapter have provided evidence that the premise of the model holds true, but that the details of each element now require updating to reflect the research data. Extant theory provided examples of concepts which would be evident at each stage of the service exchange, but in testing these theories in an internal service setting, a different set of prevailing characteristics has been discovered. A deeper understanding of the dynamics of the interpersonal relationship and how it relates to the service exchange also now allows specific concepts to be captured in the revised framework.

In the earlier framework, customer expectations were based on anticipated performance standards and the trustworthiness of the service provider (Llewellyn 2001). Through the empirical study conducted, it became apparent that more critical factors were clarity about what the service provider could do and how the service could be accessed, responsiveness to the particular needs of the customer, and timeliness in service provision (see Chapter 8 Section 8.2). Existing theory points to service quality being assessed by customers on the basis of satisfaction, exchange efficiency and communication (Cronin and Taylor 1992; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985), but the emphasis was different in the research findings (see Chapter 9 Section 9.2). Communication was still an important indicator of quality, but participants were more concerned by the competence of the service provider, their use of initiative to resolve problems, and the ability to form a personal connection with the service provider which would both evidence and lead to a deeper understanding of the customer's needs and priorities. In terms of service exchange outcomes, commitment as a concept received limited support in the research data, but value co-creation was more in evidence (see

Chapter 10 Section 10.5). The most important outcome of service exchange was performance and efficacy, both in relation to the specific service exchange encounter as well as to the resulting performance of the individual and their department as a consequence of the interaction. Also noteworthy was the development of personal networks which provided access in the longer term to sources of trusted advice and learning, as a consequence of service exchange relationships. This concept is not featured in the existing literature, and may be a particular element in internal service exchange relationships.

Figure 12.2 provides a revised version of the conceptual model, noting the dominant themes in each element of the service exchange relationship that emerged from the empirical research described in this thesis.

Figure 12.2: Revised conceptual framework of the internal service exchange relationship



(Source: Author)

For the interpersonal relationship element, the original model proposed relationship quality as the means through which this was assessed. Following the analysis of the research data, this can now be articulated more clearly and precisely for an internal service setting. As anticipated, trust was a key concept which lay at the heart of participants' assessment of the strength of their working relationships with professional service colleagues. When probed as to why certain relationships had been productive and others not so, participants frequently referred to trust as the underlying factor. Closely related to this was the concept of relational cohesion, which participants referred to in the experience of generating personal connections and networks of trusted colleagues as a result of ongoing positive service exchange interactions. The emotional bonds and unifying relationships which emerged from such interactions influenced participants' attitudes and behaviours towards both individuals and the institution as a whole. The third key concept which was absent from external service exchange theory is that of mutuality. The identification and appreciation of shared understandings, interests, goals and priorities emerged very strongly from the data as a core condition which governed subsequent interactions, fostered trust and made co-operation possible. Reciprocity as a characteristic of mutuality was also recognised as an indicator of relationship quality, but mutuality went deeper into the foundations of the relationship, covering motivations, benevolence and power relations.

This revision of the conceptual framework relocates the original concepts more firmly in an internal service context, drawing on constructs and relationship dynamics which were specifically found in internal service exchange relationships, and deprioritising those which had a closer association with external service exchange and were less evident in the empirical data collected from the three university sites sampled.

Chapter summary

This chapter digests the findings discussed in Chapters 8 to 11, and reflects on how the emerging themes correspond with the conceptual framework established in Chapter 5, which was based on existing theoretical understandings in the fields of trust, relationship quality and social exchange, as well as in service research. This evaluation demonstrates that the model holds in the light of the empirical study, but that revision was required to capture the dimensions of the internal service exchange relationships that were most prevalent in the data.

CHAPTER 13: CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the research study discussed above and examines how the findings contribute to existing theory and deepen understandings of the role of professional service staff in universities. The chapter explicitly examines how the aims and objectives of the research study have been addressed, and extends the findings of this study from theory to practice, by considering the implications of the research findings for managers and professional services staff in Higher Education, in the hope that, true to the pragmatist perspective, the empirical evidence presented in this study will provide some practical assistance to improve the working relationships between professional services staff and those they serve. The final section of this chapter reflects on limitations identified in the course of the study as well as areas for further research.

13.1 Addressing the research aims, objectives and research questions

Through an examination of the relationships between internal service providers and their customers, this research has met its aim to extend internal service quality theory by developing a deeper understanding of the contribution and dynamics of professional service staff relationships with their colleagues in a university setting. By focusing on the perceptions and experiences of service users, this research has uncovered the effects of relationship quality on service outcomes, and demonstrated the benefits and costs to individuals and institutions of strong or poor relationships between colleagues.

Research Questions

RQ1: What interpersonal and organisational factors influence the customer's expectations, experience and outcomes of university professional service use?

RQ2: What is the association between the interpersonal relationship and the customer's perceptions of service quality?

RQ3: How does relationship quality affect the customer's attitudes, behaviours and actions?

In addressing the research questions outlined above and in Chapter 5 Section 5.2, this research has analysed the expectations, experience and outcomes of professional

service use in universities and as a result has been able to identify the organisational and interpersonal factors which influence customer perceptions of service quality, in both positive and negative directions. These factors are intricately bound together, such that the organisational context can drive or constrain the development of co-operative relationships, depending on the circumstances. Interpersonal relationships thrive in certain conditions, but equally, if sufficiently strong they can also mitigate more challenging organisational contexts and tensions. They have the potential to be a positive force in any situation, and are therefore strongly valued by internal customers.

The conceptual framework which underpinned the study's research design was effective in providing the basis to analyse the primary data and explore patterns and connections between the different elements, and to assess the ways in which interpersonal relationships between colleagues influence service expectations, experience and outcomes on the part of the service user. The findings show unequivocally that future engagement with internal service providers is influenced by prior experience, and that expectations will colour the customer's judgement of service quality. A greater tolerance of service deficiencies is demonstrated where relationships are strong and where customers understand their work relationships independently from service constraints.

Relationship quality is shown to influence the customer's attitudes and behaviours toward the service provider in the longer term and this is particularly illustrated through the development and strengthening of enabling and supportive networks of trusted colleagues. These relationships prevail for many years following the initial experience, extend beyond structurally-mandated service use and endure even as staff move roles and change their responsibilities, as a result of recollections of high quality service exchange experiences. Conversely, when experiences had been less positive, participants are more cautious about reinvesting in building trusted relationships than they are at the initial trust-formation stage, with trust recovery seen as a significantly longer process, if it could be achieved at all.

The five most significant themes which emerged from the empirical study and which are examined in Chapter 10 above evidence the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in internal service exchange. Collectively, the themes enable a holistic understanding of the complex interplay of interpersonal and organisational factors which can enhance or inhibit co-operative and collaborative working relationships and their ability to generate

value. For example, the findings relating to the use of discretionary behaviour to overcome bureaucratic obstacles speak directly to the complexities of the HE context, and acknowledge the scope of the individual's freedom to act and to employ situational judgements which are influenced by interpersonal relationships. The thematic perspective also allows an appreciation of the consequences of such relationships at both individual and organisational levels, and of the personal and professional impact experienced by those engaging with professional services colleagues. Implications of internal service exchange relationships were experienced through practical as well as psychological outcomes, and these could have significant positive or negative effects on staff morale, motivation, commitment and performance.

Overall, all the objectives for this research study were fully met, with the empirical data providing evidence of the dynamics of internal service exchange relationships in a university setting. The findings provide partial insights for Research Question 3, in that the perspective is only that of the customer, and therefore cannot be fully conclusive. This issue is addressed in more detail in Section 13.4 below.

13.2 Contribution to theory

Through an empirical examination of working relationships of university staff with their professional services colleagues, this research has generated new evidence which builds knowledge about the significance of these working relationships in an internal service setting. In particular, this study contributes to understandings of internal service exchange relationships and the contribution of support staff to internal service provision outcomes for other colleagues, both in academic and non-academic roles. The research has also demonstrated the positive role strong interpersonal relationships play in internal service exchange as well as the effects of weaker relationships. Professional service colleagues are highly valued when they are partners in enabling, generative working relationships, and their contributions are felt in tangible ways. Research findings clarify the characteristics of working relationships with professional services staff which are most valued and which make the greatest difference to others. These include their ability to navigate complex organisational challenges, their extensive personal networks which can be drawn on for discretionary favours, their specialist and technical expertise, and the motivating, enhancing effects of having a personal connection with a trusted colleague. A more strained relationship, or the absence of a positive relationship was

also found to have tangible consequences, at both institutional and individual levels, which could hinder or constrain university staff in achieving their objectives.

Through a detailed examination of the benefits of positive relationships, this research contributes empirical evidence of value co-creation processes, adding to the works of Wilden et al. (2017); Lyons and Brennan (2019) and Vargo and Lusch (2017) by extending understanding into the internal service context. Evidence gathered identified customer outcomes of service exchange experiences and provided tangible examples of how increased value could be generated from service interactions when these were performed within positive interpersonal relationships between colleagues. Co-operative relationships were shown to yield substantial benefits for service users, which continued to accumulate over time and become reciprocal. Through a comparison with less positive relationships, findings also demonstrated how value co-creation processes were absent when exchange interactions were more strained or when there was no personal engagement at all. In such circumstances the loss of value to the organisation could be quantified in terms of the absence of the positive outcomes, as innovation and creativity is dampened, and staff are not motivated to progress important initiatives because the lack of co-operative relationships makes this too difficult.

Trust theory (e.g. Colquitt, Scott and LePine 2007; Dirks and Ferrin 2001; Kramer 1999; Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995) and relationship quality theory (e.g. Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987; Palmatier et al. 2006; Roberts, Varki and Brodie 2003) have primarily focused on understanding the effects and implications of these constructs on interpersonal relationships in organisational settings, and have concentrated on the positive effects of trust and high quality relationships, as well as the consequences of lower quality relationships on business performance. Whilst this thesis also set out to use these perspectives to examine the differences between positive, productive working relationships and those that are less so, this research has in addition uncovered evidence about the consequences of an absence of an interpersonal relationship. Following the reasoning of prevailing literature in these two fields, it was expected that the absence of a relationship would be neutral for the exchange relationship, with neither the positive aspects of high quality relationships nor the negative aspects of more dysfunctional relationships. In fact, the evidence from this study shows that the absence of an interpersonal relationship can produce the same negative consequences as poor relationships, as well as foregoing the positive effects of stronger relationships.

Beyond the specifics of value co-creation, this research demonstrates more broadly how relationship quality affects service exchange in an internal service setting. Earlier studies of relationship quality have looked at buyer-seller exchange in services selling (e.g. Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990; Zhang et al. 2016) and at the significance of relationship quality between colleagues in work teams (e.g. Sias 2005), but have not combined these situations where arguably the interpersonal relationship would have greater significance due to the longer term nature of the relationship and the fact that interactions may not be a matter of choice. Internal service literature had also not considered the role of interpersonal relationships in any depth. The contribution of this research therefore is to bring the relationship quality perspective to bear on internal service provision, to demonstrate how the interplay between organisational and interpersonal factors in a university setting influences service outcomes, performance and value. The findings show that relationship quality affects service outcomes for service users both individually and at institutional level, and that these manifest differently from external service exchange. In particular, the role of mutuality and shared understandings, priorities and values were found to be of greater significance in an internal setting than in an external exchange relationship.

Finally, the applicability of relationship quality theory to a Higher Education setting is confirmed by this study. The primary data provides ample examples to support HE literature regarding the experiences of organisational complexity, interdependence, staff relations, tensions and identities, and how the quality of relationships with service colleagues can help or hinder staff in meeting these challenges. The findings also recognise the interdependent nature of relationship dimensions and the interplay between dyadic relationships and wider contextual and situational factors, as well as the dynamic nature of such relationships (Zhang et al. 2016). That social exchange takes place in a network of dependent relationships (Cook and Emerson 1978) is strongly supported, especially in an internal service setting where relationships are mandated. The findings also support the underpinning social embeddedness theory, as service exchanges were found to be facilitated or destabilised by social relations (Uzzi 1996), and that trust and reciprocity as outcomes of internal service exchange are perceived as indicators of relationship quality.

13.3 Application of findings in practice

Relationships and interpersonal exchanges can be difficult to measure in practice, and their impact can be intangible and hard to quantify in the workplace, leading to a preference by managers to focus on more tangible elements of service delivery and performance. This research purposely provides empirical evidence to redress this balance, illustrating the tangible consequences of internal exchange relationships to better appreciate their contribution to individual and organisational performance. The implications outlined below are grounded in the research evidence of this study, and have been validated by senior leaders in each of the three institutions surveyed. Whilst the conclusions of this study may be relevant to the HE sector beyond the three universities in which the research was conducted, the findings may not all be applicable to all universities, and some aspects may resonate more strongly in certain situations than in others.

13.3.1 Implications for Higher Education managers

Centralisation was a prevailing theme in the background of working relationships with university professional services staff, as institutional approaches to the organisation of departments and services were seen to drive the allocation of resources and service delivery models on campus. Differing views between the senior management and departmental leaders about the extent to which services ought to be centralised were frequently expressed, and lay behind descriptions of tensions around power and control in the system. Co-location as a service model was viewed as a useful compromise position, which enabled centralised services to have stronger connections with and understanding of the needs of the departments they served. When explicitly discussed, participants were actually more exercised about the effects of centralisation and its unintended consequences, than the principle of centralisation itself.

The findings imply that if sufficient attention is given to employing mechanisms to address the negative consequences, then less energy would be spent in contesting or subverting centralised structures. Specifically, the two key areas of concern which emerged from this study are (1) consultation and the voice of the customer, and (2) the misalignment of control and accountability. In the first area, this study implies that in centralised services specific efforts should be made to actively seek to understand the needs of the customer on a continual and genuine basis, and to consciously build these into service design decisions. Co-location can increase such opportunities and enhance

the process, but if it is not a viable option, then it should be recognised that separation of the service provider from the point of service delivery will require providers to take additional measures to understand customer needs. In the second area, the greatest concern was that centralised services controlled the allocation of resources and the ways in which they were used, but that the consequences of these decisions were experienced at departmental level, and that it was departments which were held accountable for the effects of service failings when they were not able to control the inputs. The development of mechanisms to evaluate service quality and to hold centralised services to account for the consequences of poor service quality would be welcomed and provide a means to address such tensions and perceptions of inequity.

This study also uncovered participants' unease with service models which excluded the possibility of developing exchange relationships with individuals, and highlighted the exchange inefficiencies which could ensue, as well as the lost potential for value co-creation processes to emerge. Whilst resource accounts and online portals are likely to continue to be a feature of mass service delivery models, the findings from this study imply that greater attention should be given to removing anonymity within these approaches and to recognising the human need to establish a personal connection and rapport with colleagues from whom they are requesting help. In evaluating service quality and designing service delivery models, service leaders should consider the implications for service exchange relationships which this research has shown can have tangible outcomes for business efficiency, staff motivation and value for money. Business cases for service provision would be more realistic if the implications of service decisions for effective co-operation between colleagues were recognised and taken into account, to avoid unintended negative consequences which affect service outcomes.

Another key theme for HE managers and those with responsibility for professional services functions is leadership. Specifically, the leadership of professional services on campus requires informed decision-making about the best use of limited resources in order to provide maximum capacity, and it was the issue of capacity that was one of the most frequently identified reasons for service failings by participants in this study. Consequences of lack of capacity to support academic functions include poor value for money, inefficiency, lost opportunities for income generation and more expensive staff spending time on lower level administrative tasks which divert them away from their own tasks. These findings imply that service leaders should consider the outcomes of service

constraints from the customer perspective, as it may be that service decisions and budget restrictions are leading to false economies at institutional level, and there may be a stronger business case for increased resource if this can be demonstrated to improve cost effectiveness.

In addition to issues of value for money, HE managers are encouraged to learn the lessons from this study in terms of the effects of internal service quality issues on staff productivity and performance. When service providers and customers work co-operatively together to pool resources and collectively solve problems, the value created for the individuals and institution is tangible and motivational for all involved, leading to further opportunities for innovation and performance improvement. Conversely, by far the most frequently cited consequence of poor service exchange relationships was sheer frustration which stymied progress, sapped morale and squandered goodwill. The findings of this research imply that organisations experiencing such negative outcomes on a repeated or regular basis will find it harder to respond to challenges and problems, as staff will be demotivated, disengaged and lack the networks of co-operative relationships required to pull together in difficult times. The logic in encouraging staff to invest in their working relationships for the benefit of their own job satisfaction and performance as well as that of the institution is therefore clear.

The role of the service leader was also recognised by participants as being significant in instilling competence, professionalism and a customer service culture within their service delivery team. The findings of this study provide evidence of the importance of interpersonal skills and relationship-building approaches by professional services staff as contributors to service quality, and therefore service leaders would be benefit from developing these capabilities within their teams, as well as explicitly recognising the value of staff working in these ways. Recruitment, selection and career progression processes should be designed to enable assessment of aptitudes and capabilities of candidates in these areas, and reward such behaviours to encourage appreciation of their importance.

13.3.2 Implications for Higher Education professional services staff

Whilst this study gathered data from customers of professional services and therefore presented a perspective from only one side of the service exchange relationship, the findings provide insights into the expectations and experiences of customers which can

help service providers to understand the implications of service delivery decisions for those they aim to help. Whether or not expectations are reasonable, understanding the customer's needs and values and identifying mutual interests and shared goals will enable dialogue between the two parties to establish co-operative relationships based on trust and mutual respect. Service quality can then emerge from the management of expectations which ensure customer satisfaction, and through the recognition of the role of the customer in value co-creation processes. If the customer's perspective is not valued and the customer not involved in service decisions, then service quality will likely fall short of expectations.

The research findings also indicate the significance for service exchange of a personal connection between service provider and customer which can be fostered through open and honest communication. This implies that investing in the service exchange relationship is an investment worth making because of the intangible benefits this can bring in the long term, including exchange efficiency, perceptions of performance and service quality, increased tolerance of service constraints, and an enhanced personal network which will yield personal and professional advantages. Co-location within an academic department is recommended by participants as a route towards developing strong working relationships and shared understandings between academic and professional services staff, but investing time in relationship-building and visiting the academic setting may achieve the same thing if co-location is not feasible. Professional services staff may also consider a secondment to an academic department as a means to broaden their experience and perspective of academic life, and colleagues who had such career experience were recognised as being able to better manage the inherent tensions and conflicting priorities between academic and non-academic staff, and between the central university and the local departmental needs, because they could 'speak the language' of each setting.

The study demonstrated the qualities which customers valued most in their professional service colleagues, including professional competence, responsiveness and reliability. Alongside these, one of the key behavioural traits which participants valued above all was the use of initiative and problem solving skills, and taking ownership of problems and seeing them through to resolution on behalf of the customer. Recognising that universities are complex bureaucratic structures, the value of a colleague who can take responsibility for navigating through the institutional policies and processes and apply

appropriate discretion was very much appreciated. These findings provide some insights for professional services staff as to the importance of certain skills, experience and behaviours for their performance and career progression.

A final implication of this study for professional services staff is the significance of how they frame their role in relation to those they serve. As noted above, participants valued professional service colleagues when they helped to steer a course through university processes and took on the role of dealing with organisational complexities, shielding their colleagues from bureaucracy and unnecessary administration. On the other hand, when exchange relationships with professional service colleagues faltered, participants frequently cited support colleagues' unhelpful approaches towards rules and regulations and were frustrated by the 'computer-says-no' attitude which made no attempt to problem solve or understand the customer's perspective or needs. Examples were given of differing attitudes in the same services (for instance, procurement and finance), underlining that it is not the nature of the service which determines the approach taken, but the behaviours and attitudes of the individual service colleague.

The implication of these findings is that professional service colleagues can decide individually whether to act in a policing or in an enabling, more facilitative manner. A policing approach is likely to forgo the value co-creation benefits of positive working relationships, whilst the enabling approach will lead to trusting, co-operative relationships. In both approaches, rules may be applied and compliance maintained to the same extent, but it is the manner of their application which will determine the outcome of the exchange.

13.4 Limitations and areas for further research

In reflecting on the research aims, design and methodology, and in the light of the findings achieved, it is apparent that supplementary research and the addition of alternative perspectives could further strengthen knowledge in this direction.

This study prioritised the perspective of the customer, in line with service quality measurement literature (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985; Cronin and Taylor 1992; Prakash 2019). Data was therefore only gathered from staff from their perspective as service customers, whereas in practice there are two participants in each dyadic relationship – the customer and the provider. Whilst this was justified on the basis of

service quality being ‘in the eye of the beholder’, the perspective of the service provider on their working relationships with customers would potentially provide an added dimension to understandings of relationship quality and dynamics, and its development in internal service exchange.

Data was gathered on one day in the life of each participant, and over a six month period, and so can only be considered a snapshot of experiences against the institutional conditions over that period. Longitudinal data with multiple participants, or following a dyadic relationship over a period of time may provide deeper insights into the dynamics of relationships and the effect of contextual factors. Similarly, limitations of time and resource for this study meant that participants involved in the research were drawn from only three institutions. The study could be extended further into different types of university with different models of service delivery in order to test the findings further.

On reflecting on the experience of conducting the fifty interviews which formed the empirical data for this study, the personality of the participant themselves may be a significant factor in how their working relationships are experienced and described. To some degree, the sampling approach enabled a spread of participants from different disciplinary backgrounds and job roles, but the question of whether an individual is a ‘people-person’ and the extent to which they value working relationships was not explicitly addressed. For instance, if a participant does not recognise the influence of relationships on their day-to-day experience of work, they may be less able to reflect on these but also be less troubled by difficult relationships. Conversely, if a participant places a high value on their interpersonal relationships with their colleagues, they may feel the consequences of difficult relationships more keenly. Future research in this field could employ a personality questionnaire in advance or alongside the interviewing of participants, in order to factor in personality differences, preferences and values.

Further research into relationship quality in internal service exchange could test the conceptual model in other sectors where internal service provision is a factor in overall organisational performance, such as in local government, healthcare, professional service firms and other commercial settings. This would allow the influence of the sectoral norms to be taken into account, and test whether these findings from the HE sector are applicable in other service settings. Another potential avenue to test these internal service dynamics further would be to explore more directly the influence of

different service delivery models on relationship quality. Using a typology of service models, the extent to which each type structures the interpersonal relationship and shapes the internal exchange between colleagues could be evaluated to ascertain whether these lead to tangible differences in outcome.

Concluding remarks

In presenting this research and the empirical evidence of the experiences and consequences of working relationships with professional services staff, a deeper understanding of the value and contribution – and potential contribution – of professional services staff on campus is gained, which goes beyond anecdote and institutional narrative. Relationships founded on trust, communication and the recognition of shared values and interests are critical in allowing the contribution of these staff to be maximised, and for effective co-operative relationships to emerge which drive enhanced performance and progress towards strategic priorities for the institution. If such relationships are nurtured and valued, a university's investment in professional services can make an appreciable difference to the working lives of academic and professional services staff, yielding practical, social and psychological benefits which increase performance and make the university a more successful and rewarding place to work.

Throughout the interactions with participants involved in this study, whether with academic or professional services staff, what emerged in common across all three sites was a tangible sense of pride in their work and their workplace relationships, and a will to see improvements in areas which were perceived to be underperforming. Any gripes expressed stemmed from the knowledge that things could and should be done better, and from expectations of professionalism which set high standards of performance and behaviour. Participants were committed to resolving issues because they believed that this would benefit the university and themselves in equal measure, and allow both to be more successful and productive in future:

> *I have a sense of people's genuine care for the work they are doing, their genuine interest in it, their desire to make things better (Site B, Academic).*

Such staff attitudes are encouraging in that they provide the necessary foundations for universities to build successful internal collaboration and a common sense of purpose, commitment and ownership which can unite staff across departmental and occupational divides and produce valuable benefits for all.

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Appendix 1: Higher Education literature review: Analysis of themes

Paper	*All staff / no distinction*	*Academic staff only*	*Support staff*	*Governance / control / structure*	*Organisational culture and climate*	*Managerialism / neoliberalism*	*Leadership and management*	*Performance / quality / effectiveness*	*Employee relations*	*Experience of work*	*Co-operation / collaboration*	*Professional identity*
Abdullah (2005)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick and Walker (2007)	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
Agasisti and Catalano (2006)	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ahmed et al. (2015)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
Al-Kilani and Twaissi (2017)	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Alach (2017)	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
Alexander (2000)	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Allen (2003)	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
Allen-Collinson (2009)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Anderson (2006)	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
Arena, Arnaboldi and Azzone (2010)	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Baltaru (2018)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Baranova, Morrison and Mutton (2011)	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Barry, Chandler and Clark (2001)	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Bejan et al. (2015)	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Bejou and Bejou (2016)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Bennett and Kane (2014)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Berkovich and Wasserman (2017)	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Bryman (2007)	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Burnes, Wend and By (2014)	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
By, Diefenbach and Klarner (2008)	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Cameron, Kim and Whetten (1987)	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Casu and Thanassoulis (2006)	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

Chahal and Devi (2013)	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Chandler, Barry and Clark (2002)	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0
Cheng and Tam (1997)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Ciancio (2018)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Clark, Fine and Scheuer (2017)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Clegg and McAuley (2005)	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
Cox and Verbaan (2014)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Cullen and Perrewe (1981)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Curran and Prottas (2017)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Davis, Rensburg and Venter (2016)	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
Dearlove (2002)	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
Decramer, Smolders and Vanderstraeten (2013)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Deem and Brehony (2005)	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Deem (2006)	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Deem (2010)	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
Diamond and Rush, (2012)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
Diaz-Mendez and Gummesson (2012)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Dobson (2000)	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Dobson and Conway (2003)	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Doherty and Manfredi (2006)	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
Dollinger, Lodge and Coates (2018)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Duke (2001)	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Dunnion and O'Donovan (2014)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Durvasula, Lysonski and Madhavi (2011)	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Dužević, Baković and Štulec (2014)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
Enders, de Boer and Weyer (2013)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Enders and Naidoo (2018)	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
Farndale and Hope-Hailey (2009)	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2012)	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
Galloway (1998)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0

Gawley (2007)	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Giannakis and Bullivant (2016)	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Gibbs and Dean (2015)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gillespie (2018)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
Gonzales (2015)	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
Gornitzka and Larsen (2004)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Graham (2010)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
Graham and Regan (2016)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
Gray (2015)	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
Gupta, Herath and Mikouiza (2005)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Hackman (1985)	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Hall (2011)	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Heck, Johnsrud and Rosser (2000)	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Hedrick, Wassell and Henson (2009)	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Hoecht (2006)	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
Holtzhausen and Fourie (2011)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Hoppes and Holley (2014)	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
Jacobs et al. (2007)	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
Jameson (2012)	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Jameson (2018)	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1
Jarvis (2000)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Jarzabkowski (2002)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Jonasson, Normann and Lauring (2014)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Jones (2002)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno (2008)	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Kairuz et al. (2016)	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Kenny (2018)	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
Kezar (2004)	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
Khan and Matlay (2009)	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
Kharouf et al. (2014)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Kok and McDonald (2017)	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0

Kolsaker (2014)	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
Kuo (2009)	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Lauring and Selmer (2011)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Lauwerys (2002)	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Liefner (2003)	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
Lintz (2008)	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
MacFarlane (2015)	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Martin (2008)	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Maughan Brown (2000)	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
McAleer and McHugh (1994)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1
Mcinnis (1998)	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
McKenna and Boughey (2014)	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
McMurray and Scott (2013)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
McNay (2005)	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Meng et al. (2014)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Middlehurst (2013)	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Migliore (2012)	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
Newell and Swan (2000)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Nickson (2014)	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Olssen (2016)	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Olssen and Peters (2005)	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
Parker and Jary (1995)	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Peters (2013)	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0
Peterson (1974)	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
Pick, Teo and Yeung (2012)	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
Pitman (2000)	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Preston (2001)	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Prysor and Henley (2018)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Quinn, Lemay and Larsen (2009)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Regan and Graham (2018)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Roberts (2018)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1

Rosser (2004)	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Rowlands (2018)	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Ryttberg and Geschwind (2017)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Sahney (2016)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sebalj, Holbrook and Bourke (2012)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Selmer, Jonasson and Lauring (2013)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Sengupta and Ray (2017)	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Sharabi (2013)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Sharif and Kassim (2012)	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
Shattock (2013)	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Shattock (2017)	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Shore and Wright (1999)	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
Small (2008)	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Smart and St John (1996)	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Smeenk et al. (2009)	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Smerek and Peterson (2007)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Smith, Smith and Clarke (2007)	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
Smith and Shoho (2007)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Soutar and McNeil (1996)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Spendlove (2007)	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Sporn (1996)	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stensaker and Maassen (2015)	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Stensaker and Vabo (2013)	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
van Stratten, du Plessis and van Tonder (2016)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1
Strike and Taylor (2009)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Sultan and Wong (2012)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sultan and Wong (2013)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sunder (2016)	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Szekeres (2006)	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
Szekeres (2011)	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1

Szekeres (2004)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tahseen and Akhtar (2016)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Tari and Dick (2016)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Taylor (2013)	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Teelken (2012)	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Teelken and Deem (2013)	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Thoenig and Paradeise (2014)	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Tierney (2003)	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Tipples and Jones (1999)	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
Trivellas and Dargenidou (2009)	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Trow (1994)	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Trow (2006)	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Tytherleigh et al. (2005)	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Veles, Carter and Boon (2018)	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Vidovich and Currie (2011)	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Waugh, R. (2002)	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Waugh, W. (1998)	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
Whitchurch (2006)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Whitchurch (2008)	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Whitchurch and Gordon (2013)	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
White, Carvalho and Riordan (2011)	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
Wohlmuther (2008)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
Yen et al. (2014)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Yielder and Codling (2004)	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
Yokoyama (2006)	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
de Zilwa (2007)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total no. of occurrences	**91**	**52**	**57**	**78**	**74**	**53**	**69**	**100**	**76**	**51**	**57**	**51**

Appendix 2: Ethical Approval Record

Coventry University ETHICS

Medium to High Risk Research Ethics Approval

Project Title

Work relationships of university professional services staff

Record of Approval

Principal Investigator

I request an ethics peer review and confirm that I have answered all relevant questions in this checklist honestly.	X
I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described in this checklist. I will immediately suspend research and request new ethical approval if the project subsequently changes the information I have given in this checklist.	X
I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agreed to abide by the Code of Research Ethics issued by the relevant national learned society.	X
I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agreed to abide by the University's Research Ethics, Governance and Integrity Framework.	X

Name: Thea Gibbs .....

Date: 14/04/2017 .....

Student's Supervisor (if applicable)

I have read this checklist and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the student and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.

Name: Husni Kharouf .....

Date: 10/11/2017 .....

Reviewer (if applicable)

Date of approval by anonymous reviewer: 18/11/2017

Appendix 3: Template letter to institutional gatekeepers

Faculty of Business and Law
Priory Street
Coventry
CV1 5FB

1 November 2017

Dear [Registrar / HR Director]

Research study of university professional services in the UK

I am contacting you to seek permission to conduct a small research project with around 15 staff at [name of institution] on the topic of the workplace relationships of university professional services staff. This study is part of my doctoral research project, and I very much hope that the findings will be of interest in the HE sector and of use to those involved in managing professional service provision on campus.

I am based in the Midlands and have selected [name] University as one which could offer a useful perspective when set alongside the other two institutions in which I am also conducting this study. Further details are outlined below to enable you to consider this request, and I would be most grateful for any assistance you are able to provide.

Purpose of the study
Given the investment that the higher education sector makes in support staff who constitute 51% of the UK university workforce, and the importance of effective working relationships across institutions to adapt to organisational challenges, a deeper understanding of the contribution and dynamics of cooperative relationships could help institutions to capitalise on the strengths of all their staff.

Findings from this study will complement current understandings of support service delivery models and structures which are typically more process-oriented, and will offer an evidence-base for university managers to inform decisions about the organisation of internal resources and effective support service provision.

Research questions
This study seeks to understand the organisational and interpersonal factors which affect service experience, and how these factors influence and are influenced by the attitudes, behaviours and relationships of university staff accessing those services.

This research will explore the following questions:

1. What factors influence the user's expectations, experience and outcomes of engagement with university professional services?
2. What is the association between the interpersonal relationship and the user's perceptions of service quality?
3. How does the quality of the working relationship between service provider and service user affect the user's attitudes, behaviours and actions in the longer term?

Proposed approach
This study seeks to uncover the experience of university staff from the perspective of the 'customers' of university professional services. Participants will be both academic and non-academic service users, who have ongoing relationships with service providers. Semi-structured interviews will be undertaken in three institutions in the UK, and data will be analysed using a thematic analysis technique. Participants will be invited to take part in a short follow-up exercise on the basis of initial themes identified.

Confidentiality and data handling
Data collection will take place only with the express permission of your institution and the individual volunteer participant. With permission, interviews will be digitally recorded and then transcribed so that there is a written record of what was said in the interview. The written interview record will be held in a password-protected computer file.

No institutions nor individuals will be identifiable from the data or written reports of findings from the research. Data will be anonymised to protect the identities of participating staff and institutions, and information disclosed to the researcher in confidence will be treated accordingly.

Access to research findings
With a professional background in university administration, I am acutely aware of both the sensitivities of this study, as well as the potential practical benefits of the findings for both service providers and service users. If you were able to agree to my request to conduct part of this study at your university, I would be happy to return this favour by offering enhanced access to the findings in the form of a tailored report and / or a presentation and facilitated discussion with your senior management team to provide you with direct benefit from the insights achieved.

I hope that the details presented above and the nature of the proposed study are of interest to you, and that your institution may be prepared to participate in the research. I would be very happy to discuss this request with you or to provide further information for your consideration if needed. In the meantime, thank you for your time in considering this request, and I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Thea Gibbs
PhD Student in Faculty of Business and Law
Head of Operations in Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations
Coventry University

Appendix 4: Template email to participants

Subject: Research on working relationships with university support staff

Dear [Name],
I hope this finds you well. Forgive this approach out of the blue - I am writing to ask whether you might be prepared to be interviewed on the above topic as part of my doctoral research study. [Name of institutional gatekeeper] has approved my conducting this research at [site name], and if you are able to participate I would be most grateful to you.

The attached participant information sheet gives you more details of the study. In brief, I am researching the working relationships of university professional support staff from the point of view of their customers, who may be academic or non-academic staff.

[For professional services staff use this phrase] Whilst you yourself are a member of professional service staff, I would be seeking your views as a user of other professional services, and I am interested in your reflections on these working relationships.

[For academic staff use this phrase] As an academic with experience of various management responsibilities, you will have worked with a number of professional services, and I am interested in your reflections on these working relationships.

I plan to visit [site name] on several days over the next month or so, and the interview would take around 45 minutes, would be conducted in confidence and the data then anonymised. If you are happy to participate, I would be grateful if you could let me know whether any of these dates would be suitable to meet with you:

- [Day, date, month]
- [Day, date, month]
- [Day, date, month]

I look forward to hearing from you in due course, and thank you once again for considering my request.

With best wishes,
Thea

Appendix 5: Participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Work Relationships of University Professional Services Staff

This sheet is for you to keep and tells you more about the study and what it involves.

1. Purpose of the project

This interview is part of a study about how the work relationships between university support staff and their colleagues can affect and be affected by the experience of the service provided. We are interested to find out about your day-to-day experiences of accessing professional services provided by your colleagues at your university, and in hearing about the factors which influence your service use. We are interviewing a number of staff in both academic and non-academic roles in three different universities to gain a range of viewpoints. The study is funded by Coventry University as part of its Staff Doctoral Programme, and the researchers conducting it are based at Coventry University.

2. Why have I been chosen?

You have been selected because your role and experience is suitable for this study, and because we are looking for a mix of participants from a range of academic disciplines, departments and roles. In particular you have been selected because you meet the sample criteria of having been in your current post for more than one year, and in a position where you have ongoing relationships with service providers.

3. Do I have to take part?

Participation in this research project is voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part. You may also withdraw your participation at any stage if you wish.

4. How are you going to collect data?

- We are going to interview around 50 staff individually.
- All the interviews will be face-to-face discussions, of approximately 45 minutes.
- With your permission, we will digitally record your interview, and then it will be transcribed so that we have a written record of what was said in the interview.
- We may invite participants to take part in a short follow-up exercise using the initial findings from the interviews.

5. What are the risks associated with this project?

A risk assessment has been conducted for this project, and no residual risks for research participants have been identified. Risks relating to research ethics have been addressed in the design of this study and in data collection protocols which will be adhered to.

6. What are the benefits of taking part?

Your involvement will contribute a user's perspective to this study which looks beyond structures and processes to understand the impact of relationships in the workplace. Findings from this study will offer an evidence-base for university managers to inform decisions about the organisation of internal resources and effective support service provision. In return for your time and participation you will be provided with a report on the findings when the project is complete so that you can see the outcome of your involvement.

7. Withdrawal options
    - If you agree to take part in this interview, but feel at any stage that you would like to stop, you are free to do so at any time without giving a reason, and your data will be destroyed.
    - If after the interview has taken place you decide you do not want your comments used in the study, you are free to do so and your data will be destroyed.

8. Data protection & confidentiality
    - No institutions nor individuals will be identifiable from the data or written reports of findings from the research. Data will be anonymised to protect the identities of participating staff and institutions, and information disclosed to the researcher in confidence will be treated accordingly.
    - The written interview will be held in a password-protected computer file.
    - When we write up the interviews we will change the names of the people and organisations involved to protect the identities of everyone who has taken part.
    - The researchers will not disclose any information shared in confidence during the interviews with anyone else, other than in anonymised form such that neither the individual nor the institution could be identified.
    - Data collected will be retained and held securely for a period of 10 years after completion of this study.

9. What if things go wrong? Who to complain to

If the matter cannot be resolved through a discussion with the researcher, and you have concerns about the nature or conduct of this study, please contact Dr Husni Kharouf in the first instance, using the contact details below.

10. What will happen with the results of the study?

The results of this study will be written up and presented in a PhD thesis, which will be available online via the Coventry University repository. The results of the study will also be presented in a short report specifically for research participants, in order to share the findings with those who contributed to making the research possible.

11. Who has reviewed this study?

This project has been reviewed by Dr Husni Kharouf, Director of Studies, and by the Ethics Review Panel in the Faculty of Business and Law at Coventry University.

12. Further information / Key contact details of researcher and supervisor

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact us:

Thea Gibbs
School of Marketing and Management
Coventry University
Priory Street
Coventry CV1 5FB
thea.gibbs@coventry.ac.uk, 024 7765 1151 or 07974 984438

Independent contact at Coventry University:

Dr Husni Kharouf
School of Marketing and Management
Coventry University
Husni.Kharouf@coventry.ac.uk, 024 7765 9438

Appendix 6: Informed consent form

Informed Consent Form

Project title: Work Relationships of University Professional Services Staff

Project summary: This proposed research explores the quality of working relationships of professional support staff in universities through the service usage and experience of their 'customers'. Using qualitative methods, the research will specifically focus on the relationship dynamics and how these influence and are influenced by service experiences. With a view to developing a deeper understanding of the contribution and dynamics of support staff relationships with their colleagues, the study will offer an evidence-base for university managers to inform decisions about the organisation of internal resources and effective support service provision. Further details about the project are provided in the accompanying participant information sheet.

	Please initial
1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet (version 1) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason	☐
3. I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in confidence	☐
4. I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study for a short period after the study has concluded (until 31 December 2018)	☐
5. I agree to the interview being recorded and for anonymised quotes to be used as part of the research project	☐
6. I agree to be contacted for a short follow-up exercise in late 2018	☐
7. I agree to take part in the research project	☐
8. I would like to receive a report based on this research when the study is complete	☐

Name of Participant: Signature of Participant: Date:	Name of Researcher: Signature of Researcher: Date:

Appendix 7: Interview schedule

Project: Work Relationships of University Professional Services Staff

Interview Schedule

Participant details

Participant identifier:

Institution code:

Department specialism:

Staff type: Academic / non-academic

Gender: Male / Female

Age bracket: Under 30 30-50 51+

Job responsibility:

Length of service in current role:

Length of service in current institution:

General introduction

- Provide copy of participant information sheet for reference
- Confirm consent and how this can be revisited
- Confirm consent to audio recording of interview
- Confirm confidentiality

Introduction to focus of interview

- Outline aims of research
- Clarify what is meant by professional support services / service provider (research support, teaching support, central administrative and operational functions e.g. HR, finance, legal, IT, marketing)
- Clarify focus on participant as user of these services
- Clarify interviewer's role as neutral but interested observer

Interview questions

1. **Which professional support services do you rely on most heavily to help you in your work?**
   [Probe proximity, whether service is optional, frequency and method of contact]

2. **What is your general opinion of professional services support in this university?**
   [Probe expectations and their basis; org context, service context, social context]
   a. **What does service quality mean to you from a customer point of view?**

3. *[Explain working relationship as accumulation of individual encounters, ongoing nature]*
   Please could you give me an example of a working relationship with a professional service colleague which is / has been particularly positive and productive (i.e. met your expectations in giving you the support you needed)?
   [Probe context, expectations, experience, outcomes, relationship quality]
   a. **What do / did you value most about the relationship?**
   b. **Has / would the quality of the relationship with the service provider influence(d) your decision to use the service again in future?**

4. **Please could you give me an example of a working relationship with a professional service colleague which is / was not so positive or productive?**
   [Probe context, expectations, experience, outcomes, relationship quality]
   a. **What do / did you find most disappointing about this relationship?**
   b. **Has / would the quality of the relationship with the service provider influence(d) your decision to use the service again in future?**

5. **In your opinion, what makes the difference between working relationships with support staff which are positive and those which are not?**
   [Probe context, experience, relationship, outcomes]

6. **Thinking about the outcomes of your working relationships with professional service colleagues beyond the specific examples you've given,**
   a. **What benefits have positive relationships brought for your work?**
   b. **What are the consequences for you when these relationships have been less positive?**

7. **In an ideal world, what would your working relationships with professional service colleagues be like?**
   a. **What difference would it make to you in your role if all your working relationships were like this?**

8. **Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't covered, but which you think is important to this study?**

Conclusion

- Thank participant for their time and contribution to the research
- Confirm willingness to be contacted again for follow-up
- Confirm contact details should they have any questions or concerns.

Appendix 8: Case classification sheet

Person	Age Group	Field / Discipline	Ethnicity	Gender	Job role category	Length of service range	Time in current role range	Previous experience in another HEI	Staff type
Cases\\A1	40-49	Social Sciences	White Caucasian	Male	Operations manager	11-20 years	3-5 years	No	PS
Cases\\A10	50+	Information services	White British	Male	Senior manager	11-20 years	Over 10 years	Yes	PS
Cases\\A11	50+	Sciences	White British	Male	Head of department	Under 5 years	Under 3 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\A12	50+	Sciences	White British	Male	Senior academic	Over 20 years	6-10 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\A13	50+	Humanities	White British	Female	Senior academic	11-20 years	Over 10 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\A14	30-39	Social Sciences	Mixed	Male	Mid career academic	11-20 years	Under 3 years	No	Academic
Cases\\A15	30-39	Social Sciences	White British	Female	Early career academic	5-10 years	6-10 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\A16	30-39	Humanities	White	Female	Early career academic	Under 5 years	Under 3 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\A2	50+	Student service	White British	Female	Manager	11-20 years	6-10 years	No	PS
Cases\\A3	40-49	Social Sciences	White British	Female	Operations manager	11-20 years	3-5 years	Yes	PS
Cases\\A4	40-49	Social Sciences	White British	Female	Operations manager	5-10 years	3-5 years	Yes	PS
Cases\\A5	50+	Sciences	White British	Female	Operations manager	5-10 years	3-5 years	Yes	PS
Cases\\A6	40-49	Sciences	White British	Female	Operations manager	11-20 years	Under 3 years	No	PS
Cases\\A7	40-49	Central administrative	White British	Female	Senior manager	11-20 years	6-10 years	No	PS
Cases\\A8	40-49	Sciences	White British	Male	Operations manager	11-20 years	Over 10 years	No	PS
Cases\\A9	50+	Sciences	White European	Male	Head of department	11-20 years	Under 3 years	No	Academic
Cases\\B1	50+	Sciences	White British	Male	Senior academic	Over 20 years	3-5 years	No	Academic
Cases\\B10	50+	Social Sciences	White British	Female	Mid career academic	Under 5 years	3-5 years	No	Academic
Cases\\B11	40-49	Social Sciences	White British	Female	Early career academic	5-10 years	Under 3 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\B12	40-49	Information services	White British	Male	Manager	Under 5 years	3-5 years	No	PS
Cases\\B13	50+	Information services	White British	Female	Senior manager	Over 20 years	Over 10 years	Yes	PS
Cases\\B14	40-49	Central administrative	British Indian	Female	Manager	11-20 years	3-5 years	No	PS
Cases\\B15	50+	Sciences	White British	Male	Mid career academic	Over 20 years	Over 10 years	No	Academic
Cases\\B16	40-49	Sciences	White British	Male	Mid career academic	11-20 years	Over 10 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\B2	50+	Sciences	White British	Male	Head of department	Over 20 years	3-5 years	No	Academic

Cases\\B3	50+	Social Sciences	White	Female	Operations manager	5-10 years	Under 3 years	No	PS
Cases\\B4	40-49	Social Sciences	White British	Male	Operations manager	11-20 years	Under 3 years	Yes	PS
Cases\\B5	40-49	Sciences	White British	Female	Operations manager	11-20 years	Over 10 years	No	PS
Cases\\B6	50+	Sciences	White British	Female	Operations manager	Over 20 years	Under 3 years	Yes	PS
Cases\\B7	50+	Sciences	White British	Female	Head of department	11-20 years	Under 3 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\B8	30-39	Sciences	White British	Female	Operations manager	11-20 years	3-5 years	Yes	PS
Cases\\B9	40-49	Student service	White British	Female	Manager	Over 20 years	Under 3 years	Yes	PS
Cases\\C1	30-39	Sciences	White British	Female	Manager	5-10 years	6-10 years	No	PS
Cases\\C10	50+	Humanities	White British	Female	Head of department	5-10 years	Under 3 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\C11	50+	Social Sciences	White Caucasian	Male	Head of department	5-10 years	3-5 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\C12	40-49	Central administrative	Black British Caribbean	Female	Manager	Over 20 years	3-5 years	No	PS
Cases\\C13	50+	Social Sciences	White British	Male	Senior academic	Over 20 years	3-5 years	No	Academic
Cases\\C14	50+	Sciences	White European	Female	Senior academic	11-20 years	3-5 years	No	Academic
Cases\\C15	50+	Sciences	White British	Male	Operations manager	Under 5 years	3-5 years	No	PS
Cases\\C16	50+	Sciences	White	Male	Senior academic	5-10 years	3-5 years	No	Academic
Cases\\C17	40-49	Information services	White British	Female	Senior manager	11-20 years	Under 3 years	Yes	PS
Cases\\C18	50+	Humanities	White British	Male	Senior academic	11-20 years	Over 10 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\C2	40-49	Sciences	White British	Female	Operations manager	11-20 years	Under 3 years	No	PS
Cases\\C3	40-49	Humanities	White British	Female	Operations manager	Under 5 years	Under 3 years	Yes	PS
Cases\\C4	40-49	Information services	White British	Male	Senior manager	11-20 years	6-10 years	Yes	PS
Cases\\C5	50+	Humanities	White British	Female	Senior academic	11-20 years	Under 3 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\C6	40-49	Central administrative	White British	Male	Senior manager	11-20 years	3-5 years	No	PS
Cases\\C7	40-49	Sciences	White British	Female	Head of department	5-10 years	Under 3 years	Yes	Academic
Cases\\C8	50+	Social Sciences	White British	Female	Head of department	Over 20 years	Under 3 years	No	Academic
Cases\\C9	40-49	Central administrative	White British	Male	Manager	Under 5 years	Under 3 years	No	PS

Appendix 9: Coding scheme

Name	No. of sources	No. of Refs	Description
Context_Organisation	48	252	Data relating to organisational context, characteristics, structures, leadership
Career progression	16	22	Issues relating to career development for academic or non-academic staff, promotion and progression.
Central v local	25	55	Comments on centralisation, decentralisation or devolved structures and their implications for service or relationship quality, differences between central and local provision
Change in organisation	14	28	Change and change initiatives at institutional level, extent and pace of change, and the way change is implemented
Complexity	23	32	Organisational complexity and need to navigate around the organisation
HE sector	8	11	Comments relating to characteristics of HE sector
Interdependence	20	31	Recognition of how one part of the business relies on others to achieve their objectives and vice versa, or as part of a network or ecosystem.
Management structures	28	48	Issues relating to organisational hierarchy, decision making structures and reporting lines
Performance management	7	7	Appraisal and review systems, and aspects of addressing poor performance to improve service
Silos	12	18	References to fragmented services, disconnected elements of a whole, lack of holistic view
Context_Service	50	608	Data relating to service provision context, service model, resourcing, structures
Absence	7	11	Issues of sickness and absence affecting service delivery
Capacity	32	89	Describes issues relating to capacity, resourcing levels and services being overstretched or otherwise.
Change	26	45	Frequent changes, difficulty keeping up with changes in service delivery, changes in staff or contacts
Choice	8	12	Comments relating to whether a service is mandatory or not, whether there is a choice about whether to use them or not, or alternative service providers available.
Co-location	33	59	Describes situations where staff are co-located and work physically closely together on a regular basis
Contact and communication	48	117	Issues relating to frequency and mode of contact or communication
Leadership	18	27	Factors relating to management and leadership of a service
Retention	22	55	Issues of staff retention and turnover affecting service delivery, business continuity
Service delivery model	29	73	Issues relating to delivery model for service, including business partner, resource pool, distributed staffing.
Context_Social	45	180	Data relating to wider social context in which relationship occurs, to include org culture, norms and social structures
Academic v admin staff relations	24	61	Issues and observations relating to relationship between the two staff groups, positive or negative.
Culture	21	52	Issues of working culture and how culture affects performance
Diversity	8	11	Issues relating to aspects of diversity (gender, sexuality, religion, age, disability, etc)

Personal network	19	40	Interpersonal connections with other individuals, connections in a wider network, having a network of people to draw on
Recognition	14	15	Formal or informal ways which recognise a contribution, appreciation, gratitude expressed
Relationship Quality	50	1576	Data relating to expectations, experience and outcomes of relationship quality
RQ Expectations	22	43	Data relating to expectations of relationships and / or relationship quality, positive or negative
Collaborative	14	24	Expectation that relationship will be co-operative, collaborative, a partnership
Commitment	7	8	Covers commitment to role, dept, institution, purpose and goals, dedication to job and a sense that the person cares about making a positive contribution
Respect	7	10	Expectation that interactions will be respectful, polite and courteous
RQ Experience	50	1067	Data relating to experience of relationships and descriptions, positive or negative
Collaboration	34	66	Working together, team work, coming together for a common purpose, symbiotic, interdependent relationship
Commitment	20	30	Individual demonstrated commitment to outcomes or department's interests, interest, buy-in and commitment to the relationship; acting as an ally, on customer's side
Communication	37	100	Items relating to communication as a factor in the relationship, e.g. information sharing, listening, use of language.
Control	25	56	Issues of control over a situation, as a customer of a service, ability to influence outcomes and priorities, power relations between customer / provider
Enjoyment	12	21	Enjoyment, fun, pleasurable experiences and camaraderie in workplace relations and teams
Goodwill	17	23	Positive trait exhibited by individuals towards others, the university or department
Go-to person	25	38	When participant mentions calling on a particular individual for help in preference to others or the nominated person
Honesty	21	37	Descriptions including honesty, openness, frankness (or lack of) as a factor in the relationship
Identification	11	19	Describes situations in which individuals identify with a unit or team and then feel more closely affiliated and invested in the outcomes, a sense of belonging
Personal connection	38	109	Individual is friendly, engaging, welcoming and approachable; interaction involves positive emotions; individual considered to be a friend; knowing someone on a personal level, connecting as a human being
Personality	25	49	Issues relating to personalities or character of those interacting with each other, whether positive or negative in consequence.
Rapport	14	29	Rapport, empathy and mutual understanding in a relationship
Respect	11	16	As a feature of a relationship experience
Shared interests	24	54	Observations of relationships where mutual interests, shared goals, priorities and agenda are significant factors, or absence of these or differing interests are noteworthy
No shared interests	8	11	Use for descriptions of lack of mutual interest or shared goals / agenda

Shared values	15	27	Shared values or attitudes held in common, or a common bond about work and work practices, on the same page, on the same wavelength
Tension	28	55	Characteristic of relationship, adversarial,' them and us' perspective, antagonism, animosity, defensiveness, blaming, battling
Blame	12	15	Characteristic of a relationship, apportioning blame, blame culture, absence of blame
Understanding	38	86	Understanding of each other, of goals, agendas and ways of working, or lack of mutual understanding
RQ Outcomes	50	466	Data relating to outcomes of relationships and / or relationship quality, positive or negative
Advice	23	38	Individual is able to access advice, guidance, sense-checks and challenge to ideas and strategies as result of relationship; critical friend; access to alternative perspectives / viewpoints
Assertiveness	16	17	Response to relationship or service difficulties is to be more assertive
Community	19	25	Sense of connectedness with wider institution or range of colleagues, sense of community and togetherness, being part of a team
Demotivation	12	14	When negative relationships lead to demotivations of individuals or teams, demoralised staff, lower engagement and enthusiasm for work
Easier	21	26	Work, tasks and life in general is easier and smoother as a result of interactions, relationship or contributions of individual
Favours	16	21	Individuals will go out of their way to help each other, beyond usual expectations, provide favours and extra effort out of goodwill generated through positive relationships
Info sharing	12	15	Sharing of information between colleagues as a result of a positive relationship
Learning	10	19	Relationship aided learning and development of knowledge, educated individual about ways of working or technical knowledge
Motivation	13	22	When positive relationships lead to increased motivation of individuals or teams
Negative emotion	26	45	Bad feelings and negative emotion in relation to a work relationship
Positive emotion	12	15	Positive emotional feelings and responses as a result of interactions and relationship, including happiness, satisfaction
Reciprocity	24	38	Reciprocal, mutually beneficial activity, based on positive relationship
Respect	8	12	Respect as an outcome to a working relationship
Tolerance	12	15	Identification of tolerance and patience (or lack of) as a characteristic of the relationship, also fore-bearance, forgiveness
Trust	37	79	Where trust or trustworthiness is mentioned as an outcome of interaction and relationship
Value co-creation	27	48	Experiences which illustrate value co-creation through service interactions and positive relations
Well-being	12	17	Outcomes relating to health and well-being of individuals
Service Quality	50	2043	Data relating to expectations, experience and outcomes of service quality

SQ Expectations	50	371	Data relating to service quality expectations, positive or negative
Accuracy	9	10	Accuracy in response to service request, attention to detail, correct and appropriate response which meets needs
Clarity	31	59	Clarity of expectations, transparency of service levels, openness about performance standards, clarity about who to contact, consistency of message
Communication	21	28	Expectation that communication will be productive and a feature of the interactions, that customers will be consulted and their views listened to
Discretion	20	35	Ability of individuals to use discretion or have some flexibility and latitude in providing a service
Efficient	13	19	Service is smooth, delivers what's needed without delay or hiccup, efficiently delivered that makes good use of everyone's time.
Honesty	5	8	Honesty, openness and transparency about service levels, outcomes; open communications
Initiative	14	17	Use of initiative, proactivity, going above and beyond basic needs, exceeding expectations, coming up with ideas, being creative to address needs
Invisible	11	13	Service seen as being invisible, frictionless, unnoticed because it is working well, not requiring thought or attention, just there and helping everything to run smoothly.
Knowledge	9	12	Service provider has sufficient knowledge, expertise and understanding of subject or issue to be able to do their job effectively
Ownership	16	23	Ownership and accountability for outcomes of support and interventions, responsibility for effects of work in business unit, taking ownership of the issue, staff empowered to make decisions and take appropriate actions
Professionalism	12	13	Expectations of professionalism and maintaining professional standards, behaving in professional ways, appropriate ways.
Reliability	10	16	Expectation of reliability and dependability of service or individual, consistency in service provision, ability to meet needs of customers
Responsiveness	30	45	A service or individual is responsive, flexible, able to adapt to changing needs
Timeliness	27	31	Service expectations around timescales and meeting deadlines
Understanding	21	35	Understanding of business or unit requiring help, to enable support to be effective
SQ Experience	50	1143	Data relating to service quality experiences and descriptions, positive or negative
Accessible	19	23	Service or staff member is accessible and available to offer support, open and willing to handle enquiries, no barriers to accessing help.
Bureaucratic processes	25	55	Descriptions of processes, bureaucracy, form-filling, paperwork, positive or negative
Chasing	15	20	Effort spent chasing up requests for support, monitoring for responses
Competence	40	103	Service providers having appropriate competence, capabilities, skills, expertise and knowledge to do their work
Customer service	17	41	Basic issues of customer service and taking responsibility for addressing the needs of the customer

Helpful	11	16	Colleagues are helpful and amenable
Supportive	14	18	Supportive and customer focused
Efficiency	16	21	Efficiency in service use or provision, exchange efficiency
Enabling	17	24	Service and support which is enabling and facilitative, helping to move things forward
Engagement	32	68	Level of engagement and motivation of service provider, commitment and dedication to providing support, a sense of whether individual cares about or is interested in the customer's needs
Errors	22	30	Problems deriving from errors, inaccuracies, mistakes, service failure
Flexibility	26	54	Observations about flexibility or inflexibility of service provision. 'Computer says no' mentality, denoting adherence to systems and regulation without satisfactory human interaction or understanding. Use of discretion or lack of discretion.
Frustration	35	97	Service performance is a source of frustration, as expectations are not met
Initiative	32	58	Service or individual has been proactive to resolve issues, take preventative action to avoid difficulties or improve efficiency or effectiveness, came up with ideas and creative solutions, used initiative or took the initiative. Also covers lack of initiative.
IT issues	22	31	Issues relating to use or introduction of new service management systems, email accounts, technical difficulties which affect service relationships
Resource account	12	15	Issues around service's use of generic email or resource account
Ownership	29	75	Use to capture instances of ownership of a problem, taking it seriously, responsibility for securing suitable outcome or referral, or lack of
Priorities	35	75	Comments relating to competing or conflicting priorities between service provider and customer, differing pressures
Problem resolution	26	53	Observations relating to resolution of problems, focus on solving issues and addressing deficiencies
Professionalism	11	13	Professional approaches by service provider, or issues of professionalism in service delivery, best practice
Reliable	25	33	Service provider can be relied on within the relationship
Responsiveness	30	58	Service provider is responsive and flexible in meeting customer needs
Role confusion	15	23	Lack of clarity of purpose of job, job remit, what can be asked and what can't, division of labour
Rules and regs	25	59	Issues relating to application of rules and regulation by service provider
Time wasted	26	47	Time seen as wasted in resolving issues with service performance
Understanding	35	82	Service or individual has or lacks understanding of business unit or adequate knowledge of customer needs to be able to resolve issues effectively, understanding of customer needs and priorities
SQ Outcomes	50	529	Data relating to service quality outcomes, positive or negative
Alternative means	14	20	Finding an alternative solution, another way of achieving the goal if service is not delivering.
Avoidance	22	41	When outcomes of service experience is avoidance of future interactions

Complaints	8	12	Poor relationship performance leads to complaints
Creativity	9	11	Innovation, creativity, ideas generation as outcomes of effective service delivery
Delays	13	21	Delays caused by service issues or lack of responsiveness, knock-on for customer's timescales
DIY	19	29	Do it yourself rather than seek help, where support or service is deficient
Efficacy	37	83	Effective performance on part of service user, getting the job done, getting more done because of being more efficient and effective.
Efficiency	24	35	Efficiency (or lack of) as an outcome of service quality
Escalation	24	38	When experience has led to escalating an issue or involving more senior staff to reach a solution because of deficiencies in the service relationship.
External customers	19	44	Comments referring to consequences of service delivery for downstream customers or external customers
Financial implications	16	27	Financial loss as a result of deficiencies in service quality; financial gain as a result of positive interactions
Reputation	19	33	Issues relating to reputation of service or individual as an outcome of service experience
Scepticism	21	31	Scepticism or reservations about a service and its ability to improve
Stress	14	16	Personal stress caused by interactions or service relationship failings, also stress of colleagues and team
Troubleshooting	15	24	Problem solving and troubleshooting by service users as a result of service deficiencies, including monitoring and checking performance.
Wasted opportunities	16	19	Wasted potential or opportunities as a result of service deficiencies or lack of support
Workload	26	44	Impact or service outcomes on individual or team workload, positive or negative in effect.

Appendix 10: Framework matrices – Extracts of themes

Extract from Framework Matrix 1: Competence, efficacy and performance

	A : Competence	B : Efficacy	D : Financial implications	E : Wasted opportunities	F : Workload
2 : A16 Site = Site A Staff type = Academic Job role category = Early career academic Field or discipline = Humanities	when you hire good people to do professional services they are very good at their jobs because they are professionals, and if you just let them get on with it, it frees up academics to do our jobs, rather than constant replication. that kind of expertise that she had the specialist knowledge of the subject areas	that was like a day and a half of phone calls and I didn't do anything else, I mean I did do something, but it felt like it, and it was weighing on my mind and thinking about it and not being as productive on other things, because what should have been a 'oh sure' and five minute ended up… and then I end up chatting to other people about it, and it becomes a thing and a distraction	I get paid nearly £50k a year, and it's ridiculous that I spend it filling out forms, but why? That's not a good use of resource, it doesn't make any sense to me, like it's easy and I'll do it, but I could be doing a lot more useful things, strategic things.	that was like a day and a half of phone calls and I didn't do anything else, I mean I did do something, but it felt like it, and it was weighing on my mind and thinking about it and not being as productive on other things, because what should have been a 'oh sure' and five minute ended up… and then I end up chatting to other people about it, and it becomes a thing and a distraction the pressures on us around research and getting marking done and seeing the queue of students who are outside your office door, if suddenly you lose a day to something mundane that someone in professional services really could have dealt with, that's very stressful and makes you frustrated and angry.	when you hire good people to do professional services they are very good at their jobs because they are professionals, and if you just let them get on with it, it frees up academics to do our jobs, rather than constant replication. So I'm doing quite a lot of admin, and I don't mind it, it's what I signed up for, I understand that it's the job. But it's also that I'm getting paid quite a lot to do some really basic things, and it doesn't seem like the best use of funds. So in terms of how this would work ideally, is that a lot of the really banal stuff I do could be done by someone else.

12 : A6 Site = Site A Staff type = Professional Services Job role category = Operations manager Field or discipline = Sciences	from the minute I entered the department that HR individual was with me, was talking to me, 'this is what we need to do', and I'd never done anything like that, but 'this is where we've got to, this is the process, this is what you will need to do, I can prepare the draft of this for you, I can do that'.	I think they give you confidence to do your job properly, whatever that is, and it makes it easier to do your job and smoother to do your job, so that you know that you're not constantly having to battle. I think where they don't work - and sometimes it's easier to explain in terms of where they don't work - you feel like you're battling all the time.	I just thought that was for me a real example of not working with the department to try to fix a problem. They'd got in their mind that the department had screwed up because this hadn't been picked up, we'd done all these things and it's your problem you fix it. Whereas the university was going to lose £200 grand, and I just thought this is not how you work effectively.	It took about 12 weeks for this contract to get signed off, it went to everybody and their mother, they were passing it round like a yoyo, saying you need to look at this now, and you need to look at this now, and we were getting asked the same questions over and over again. And my finance manager and the technician were the ones that were trying to deal with it, and I ended up having to go in and going 'right, this is silly, because we have now been round full circle, you're asking the same questions you asked 8 weeks ago, one of you make a decision and get this contract signed or we're going to lose it'. It was just stupid.	It's incredibly time consuming, it's exhausting and it feels like a battle.

30 : B8 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Job role category = Operations manager Field or discipline = Sciences	they had been in the university for a long time, they were very knowledgeable, they had a lot of case history knowledge, and knowledge of how the institution works and the policies that were in place, things that might be coming down the line, what we could and couldn't do. if you have a year in which we've had a faculty marketing manager that's changed several times unfortunately, there's a pattern here. And when you've had a change over and someone new has come in and they don't know how you do your business and what is important.	it's a way in to try and build that personal professional relationship, which means that you can then have conversations with them which are more candid, which makes it easier for me to do my job.	You've got someone new in who hasn't seen this before, who doesn't know to pick up certain things and make sure they happen, and suddenly you're in a situation where you've got fewer student numbers, and because it's a four year degree that's going to hit your books for four years. So that makes a big difference. I would want there to be a positive impact on student recruitment, on staff wellbeing and productivity, on research outcomes, financially there should be some better outcomes in terms of better budget control and spend on research budgets.		then they'll come and ask me instead, or they would end up emailing me saying, 'I can't believe this is being challenged, this is outrageous' so it would end up filling up my inbox.

41 : C10 Site = Site C Staff type = Academic Job role category = Head of department Field or discipline = Humanities	This is research finance, but I haven't had a good experience with the finance office either. So they turn up and no-one can make head nor tail of these accounts, Harry Potter accounting, none of it makes sense, and they're always apologising when they come. We has an accountant before in one of my other posts, and basically every time he came the accounts were wrong, and he would apologise that they were wrong, but I just wanted the right accounts! You're the accountant, that is your job! you're in a complete fog with finance, all the time. There is no one point when I can say I know exactly what we've spent, what we have left and what we're going to do with it. I don't think there's been one point in the nine years that I've been here that I've been able to say that.	I can say straight away that the person that works with me all the time is a really positive experience, because it's very face to face, it's very personal, we know each other's jobs, so she knows the pressures that I'm under and I know the pressures that she's under. So we just get so much more done. I think it frees you up to do what you're supposed to be doing, instead of chasing and managing and wrangling.	you lose money because things have not been done right, because people weren't there, they weren't there for the audit or they didn't get the right documents in for the audit. And it loses the university money, you could lose somebody's salary, you could have had someone sitting there for a year which would have taken the pressure off everybody else and you'd have a more efficient way of dealing with the finance, I don't really understand why they do that. And we boast in all our bids that we have this fantastic research back-up, and we just don't. If anything goes wrong I'm the one who has to go and see the finance officer at the EU, and unless I do every bit of finance myself I have no faith that things will not go wrong. It's terrible, we're talking about millions, handling budgets of millions, and it's our reputation as well.		So then you end up with four times the amount of work because things have not been done

Extract from Framework Matrix 2: Bureaucracy, rules and discretion

	A : Discretion	B : Bureaucratic processes	C : Rules and regs	D : Flexibility
20 : B2 Site = Site B Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Head of department	it is a very complex working environment with lots of individual cases and grey areas and judgement calls and things like that.	in the past if a student just wanted something to confirm that they were a student we'd just send a quick email saying yes, this person is a student. Now we're not allowed to do that, and it's perfectly understandable why, but now it's like a three step process we have to go through so people get very frustrated about that.	I think some of that is down to lack of empowerment within the systems, so people are unable to make decisions because it doesn't fit, and the round peg doesn't quite go in the round hole, and that has led to a fracture between academics and some parts of the professional services.	systems often crush that out of people because they get trapped into this kind of yes / no tick box system kind of thing.
26 : B8 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	they did get it sorted out for us and they got it done, and I knew that they weren't supposed to have pushed it through and it was a pain for them. they did get it sorted out for us and they got it done, and I knew that they weren't supposed to have pushed it through and it was a pain for them.		they understood why that was difficult and what could be done within the confines of policies and procedures that we had in the university. So they had been in the university for a long time, they were very knowledgeable, they had a lot of case history knowledge, and knowledge of how the institution works and the policies that were in place, things that might be coming down the line, what we could and couldn't do. So yes, their understanding	largely the difficulty seemed to be that they were not very useful. It was a lot of 'computer says no'. I'm so unused to encountering people who are 'computer says no' around here

27 : B3 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Social Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	the flexibility where it seems to be a malfunctioning process or service - sometimes its flexibility sometimes it's time and capacity - to actually be willing to look at that, come back and say 'well maybe we can't change it'. and would push the boundaries - would push the perceived boundaries - in order to as quickly as possible be doing the right thing.		It wasn't going against any rules or regulations or anything like that, but it was being smart, being sensible, and it helped us to contain and ensure that we were getting all of the management information about all of these separate offerings quite easily and simply	There's the odd person who doesn't have a systems thinking hat on or a holistic approach who might just dig their heels in. very, very pragmatic, very open, again very candid, and would push the boundaries - would push the perceived boundaries - in order to as quickly as possible be doing the right thing. Which at times might have been actually short cuts to policy or the cleanest, quickest route through a policy. I mean the right thing for the school or for what we needed to do and be very pragmatic. the emotional maturity, there's the flexibility and adaptability
30 : B13 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Information services Job role category = Senior manager	Being creative, in terms of problem solving. We all have our policies to which we adhere, but within that you have normally got a little bit of scope so I really don't want somebody who is just very black and white and not prepared to consider some alternatives, or for the long term would they take that back to their department. Am I the only person who this is an issue for? So if there's several of us, will you take that back and consider some change? In libraries we try to be really responsive, and so I would like others to do the same. I think that's one of the areas where I do sometimes think, 'oh come on!'	I had been working with HR for months, you know how it is, you have to do your case, do all the paperwork, go through the process, we'd got all the timeline So we've got the process, off you go, and I'm getting you through this process rather than really thinking about is that the right process, or maybe she thought this was a bread and butter thing and not something she wanted to check OK, you need to tender, here's the form, here's the process and get you through. So that was good.	Being a librarian I tend to play by the rules, so I'm not one for saying we'll just do our own thing, even though you might want to, I can't bring myself to do it.	

37 : C11 Site = Site C Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Social Sciences Job role category = Head of department	there is a tendency to move towards micromanagement and dictats. And because they're based on knowledge that is gathered from a distance that often misses the mark, so we take it with a pinch of salt or we get cross. The trust starts to build when you get to see people, spend time with them, put them right and you can say yes, that's the official stuff but let's do things differently and use our discretionary powers. Some are happy doing that and others are like 'no way!' So it's a systematic pattern, and what's interesting is that it comes from a place where they talk about rules, regulations and so on and there's no willingness to really understand, to really listen, it's the rule book that's thrown at you. And that I find quite astonishing, as it comes from very high, from the top and the co director, and I haven't been able to build much further. And I met K for the first time 10 days ago and the other person. They've been very difficult conversations and they haven't budged.	their role is really to support and enable, but there is a tendency to move towards micromanagement and dictats. And because they're based on knowledge that is gathered from a distance that often misses the mark, so we take it with a pinch of salt or we get cross. I think the mainstream culture in universities is a very mechanical approach, looking at processes, rules, and quite anonymous in many ways. sometimes following procedure does create a lot of wasted time and effort and anxiety, and it's not necessary. it was astonishing because that course had been approved at different steps in the process laid out by the university, we followed the process for nine months, and then in the final instance the registrar said no, we're not going to approve it. They felt it wasn't rigorous, they may have listened to some people who had prejudiced views on the content, but it was a legitimate area of study for us, but somehow we got blocked and I got a no for an answer.	mechanical approach, looking at processes, rules, and quite anonymous they see themselves as guardians of rules, implementers of rules and they have a policing function some of them, it really is a policing function, and there's not enough latitude to do things on the basis of trust And premises that rules and regulations are there to help, to provide a framework, they're there to help, they shouldn't be an impediment, and they shouldn't be a frigging pain either. We'll talk about process, that's important, but we don't talk about rules, regulations, compliance, that's secondary. We might check things afterwards! If there's a dead-end we look at it and think how can we circumvent the rulebook, and we do. So a healthy disrespect for the rule of law…! So it's a systematic pattern, and what's interesting is that it comes from a place where they talk about rules, regulations and so on and there's no willingness to really understand, to really listen, it's the rule book that's thrown at you	it's the human stupidity, the lack of flexibility, the lack of understanding and unwillingness to reconsider. we have to have that flexibility because the world is too complex and its very dynamic

40 : C5 Site = Site C Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Humanities Job role category = Senior academic	And I can understand why we need to have these rules, and that rules and guidelines can be really helpful, but they're not there to hit people with, and so I think an ability for people to say 'why don't you talk to so and so and we'll see if we can do it differently?' would be really helpful. It's just when somebody says you can't do that because and that doesn't make sense. So it's not the rule or the form itself, it's the way that people hold them as gatekeepers to things that should be happening, rather than thinking about what our business needs are or how we can get around it, or who can we talk to as somebody who can fix it. Who to ask and beg for special exemption.	Or when you can't do something because we don't have the form. One of the recent ones - these are not good reasons, that you can't do something because we don't have the form for it yet, and it was promised six months ago. We still need to be able to do these things, and if it was just an admin thing, and a process it wouldn't matter so much but it's not. It can have implications for people's careers, for people's progression, for people coming to the university, it has implications for people's lives which are not reasonable in that sense.	if they try to impose regulations that they've been told to impose that doesn't make sense it's very frustrating. I suppose when people say to me no you can't do that, you feel well who are you to tell me I can't do that, why are you telling me this, and that's kind of annoying. If it makes sense that I can't do certain things because I understand the reason for it, that's not just somebody says or somebody has made this guideline, or they say well someone else will do it that's fine.	In an ideal world they wouldn't be so rule-governed, that I so often get stopped by things that don't seem to make sense in terms of how I see the university. And I can understand why we need to have these rules, and that rules and guidelines can be really helpful, but they're not there to hit people with, and so I think an ability for people to say 'why don't you talk to so and so and we'll see if we can do it differently?', would be really helpful.
44 : C2 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	we all appreciate that there are systems and processes in the university which have to be in place, of course they do. But sometimes you don't want to break them but you need to flex them a little bit because life is like that.	So filling all the forms in, passing them on	And I think we built a really good relationship because actually I would say look this is what I need doing, we're not trying to break the rules, we're trying to do something completely above board, but we often have a lot of unusual issues	On reflecting why that was with both of those individuals I think it's because they were honest but pragmatic, is she a computer says no person

47 : C4 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Information services Job role category = Senior manager	the thing that makes the relationship valuable and productive to me can be summed up in one word: she listens. She'll come in, you'll meet her, and you can see that first of all she's clearly very bright which helps you listen, but she listens and she does that bit I've just talked about, I'll be saying words and she'll be listening, and working out what we actually need to do, and then she'll be flexible about how we achieve that, she takes what is my need, my goal if you like, and comes up with a way of dealing with that. work to the greater goal rather than the process ruling. Processes are there for a reason, I get that, but sometimes you just have to play it with a human intelligence of the situation.	we're doing an exercise where we're trying to procure something, and we've got a procurement framework that we've gone out on, and it's all properly compliant, and it's all been tested against the market, and said person wishes to do a benchmarking exercise, and I understand why she wants to do that to make sure we're getting best value for money, but you come back and you say well this has been pre-tendered, it's been proven against the market, and she says 'no that's not good enough, we need to do a benchmarking exercise otherwise I'm not going to put this one through'. So I'm now in the ludicrous position of having to source an external benchmarking exercise which I'm likely to have to pay around £20k for to prove what I already know which is that this deal is very competitive. And that just drives me mad, as it involves my team and the work they'll have to do, and you get the feeling that you're having to jump through hoops just to satisfy this person, and not to satisfy the objective.	occasionally she can't do what I'm asking for, because there is the law, but she will say 'look we can't do this, we have to do this, but we're going to make it as painless as possible and this is how we're going to do it'. she will listen, she will understand, she'll be flexible and she'll work to solve it, not just tell me 'this is the law and this is the rigid thing that you need to do' - and there are certainly people like that who I'm not going to name, who kind of say 'that's the process, go away'. work to the greater goal rather than the process ruling. Processes are there for a reason, I get that, but sometimes you just have to play it with a human intelligence of the situation.	It's that kind of rigidity of mind-set - it's coming from a good place, nobody's doing this to be malicious, but there's a certain inflexibility which just drives you down, drags you down these rabbit holes and I could go over this person's head, but I don't want to It's the lack of repeated flexibility, the lack of - and I'm tempted to say 'look it's my project, I'm satisfied with the value, if you're not then you pay £20k for the benchmarking process'. But it's also coupled with a lack of drive, it's like you're faced with the cops, you've broken the law and it's your problem to comply with the rule. But no actually, you're meant to be here to help me achieve the goal of the project. I get the places they are coming from, no-one sets out to be a blocker I think its words like flexibility, listening, understanding my objective and then working to deliver that objective, so getting round that if I'm coming to you with a solution. So it's probably listen, be flexible, work to the greater goal rather than the process ruling. Processes are there for a reason, I get that, but sometimes you just have to play it with a human intelligence of the situation.

Extract from Framework Matrix 3: Ownership, problem resolution and engagement

	A : Initiative	B : Engagement	D : Ownership	E : Problem resolution
1 : A12 Site = Site A Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Senior academic	be somewhat proactive as well so that they are not just doing the job, and effectively expecting the academic to do everything in terms of the decision making process. they take what you are doing and make more of it, rather than just ticking a box and moving it forward. That actually they see this thing that needs improving, they might well come back and say have you thought about this. Initiative is what I mean by proactive, you would expect that as well.	And so I've got a lot of admiration for the effort that this person has put in it's that level of commitment, so she's very committed to the project		I think I just felt that they weren't trying to find a solution, that all they were doing was playing, I don't know, perhaps towing the party line, doing it to the book, but actually not trying to solve it, and so it dragged on, when actually in my opinion there was never an issue, so why are we creating an issue when there was never one in the first place?
2 : A11 Site = Site A Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Head of department	It would be a better appreciation of what we are trying to do, and in some cases a 'can we help you' attitude rather than a 'you can't do that' attitude. There's a few bits of the university where it would be nice to see that appearing. The mentality of 'let's see if I can find a way to help you do what you want' is sometimes not there. So it's 'no you can't do that' but the follow up of 'but you could do this' is not there.	The lack of realisation of what the institution exists to do. But if we could find a way to do this, it would help, we can find a way to fund the purchase of a piece of equipment which will progress our research, allow us to write nice papers for REF, and make the institution a little bit more glorious, that's what we exist to do, but it's 'no, well you can't do it like that, we don't care.'		ability to look at a process and say 'you don't want to do it like that, you want to do it like this' is really good. I haven't got that, I'm very goal oriented, so I'd think we need to be here, I can see what's wrong and we need to be here, this is how it needs to work. And D has a really good ability to say right, you don't want to do it like that, you want to do it like this, you want to get these people involved and drawing a gantt chart of processes and structures and how to do it.

4 : A15 Site = Site A Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Social Sciences Job role category = Early career academic		the response was given ‘oh well this always happens in this sort of time’ and it was just that should be how it’s done. And that really got my back up, because I was thinking it doesn’t have to be like this, and it shouldn’t be like this	It really riled me that you don’t just accept that that’s what students have to put up with, but actually this needs to be sorted out and how can we sort that out, and it was that frustration.	It was perhaps just a throw-away comment but it was also indicative of accepting something as it was, not thinking. So it was the flip-side of ‘OK how can we do this differently, this isn’t working quite as it should’ to accepting that something hadn’t worked quite so well so that was it. It kind of happens, and these things happen.
5 : A14 Site = Site A Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Social Sciences Job role category = Mid career academic	what you want is something done, so you need someone to assist you in your job and in your role without them being noticeable, if that makes sense. Because you can always tell who the good folks are, because they either pre-empt what you need because they have got enough experience	she was really hard working However there are individuals like M over in social sciences, he will make an effort to come and see you. So he will be like ‘do you want me to come down and we’ll sit and talk it through, and there’s all these complications and we can be proactive’ and stuff like that.	Little things like ‘can you do this’ and you get ‘you’ll have to ask so and so’. that was a clear case of someone feeling it wasn’t in their capacity even to listen to the chair that they needed or wanted to go up to another level, they weren’t willing to take responsibility to say yes you can or you can’t because they’d have to find out what the regulations are. I literally am not qualified for any of this, but the bad professional services if you like are the ones that push their role onto you	

7 : A13 Site = Site A Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Humanities Job role category = Senior academic			The way the departmental structure works, that if you divvy up your IT systems across three different places some things overlap and some things don't get done at all because they are nobody's responsibility. one of the interesting things of marketing, is that sense of where academic departments don't think that that is their responsibility, that actually that should be the university, it shouldn't be us, except that if you don't alter it or if you do it badly this will have such direct effects that perhaps you have to rethink standing away from it.	the way in which they are able to think through very rapidly whatever off the curve problem you are suddenly presenting them with They can anticipate what seems to be the issues that might arise if this went awry, or if that went awry, they are both good about locating where the potential problems could show up they really were really good about thinking through the problems on the ground.
16 : A7 Site = Site A Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Central administrative Job role category = Senior manager	extrapolating why the question is being posed and how therefore it might need to be responded to. And that might come in the form of an option appraisal and a recommendation against each option, rather than just a 'this is the answer to your question'. Recognising that the ability to deliver over what the original conceptualisation might actually deliver value for the institution but it might require a little bit more effort or more time.	willing to engage at whatever level was needed		in some areas individuals are very constrained and their natural reaction is not to question the logic of something that looks inherently out of kilter or illogical in terms of what the business need might be or what the university's aspirations are. it gives you a very positive mind-set, I think when you come into work you know it's going to be an enabling atmosphere, and you know that whatever is thrown at you, there will be people who will apply their considerable intelligence to finding a fix.

17 : B15 Site = Site B Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Mid career academic	there are certain things I know I can't do and I know that I don't know what the university expects, and where there are people to pick up on those and say this is what you need to do, sign this contract, do this and everything will be fine, and to take the responsibility for that aspect away from me, that really helps you to go forward.	it's just the fact that there's somebody there who is on your particular case, and not somebody who has a lot of other things to do and it gets lost.	I'm not expecting people to necessarily do things for me, but there are certain things I know I can't do and I know that I don't know what the university expects, and where there are people to pick up on those and say this is what you need to do, sign this contract, do this and everything will be fine, and to take the responsibility for that aspect away from me, that really helps you to go forward.	we have a situation where the people in the centre could get Chemistry to charge them for the use of the facilities and they would work nicely laying that out and everything would be above board, rather than having a rolled in contract with my time and Chemistry's facilities time all-inclusive within the contract. They could deal with a contract that would have me and Chemistry as different partners, providing expertise and providing instrumentation.
19 : B1 Site = Site B Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Senior academic		just having people being happy in what they're doing so that they are more positive in wanting to help out and if there are ways of doing that it can only help.	It's positive, the emails are never 'oh I don't think I can do this', it's 'this is what you need to do', and it works. And there's lots of examples like that, really positive ones which work for us. it's the constructive way that things are done, it's a 'can-do' attitude hopefully on both sides, and certainly from their side it seems to be that they can do things to help and will do.	we have good communication, we discuss things - if we've got a discussion document that we as academics have put together we can send it to them and they will say 'well this bit is OK, this bit we're not sure we can do that, but we can work through it and come up with a solution that works for all of us'.

29 : B12 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Information services Job role category = Manager		I got the impression they were prioritising that work and taking it seriously. it was this total lack of appreciation of the issue, lack of urgency to do anything about it, it was just… and this was a critical situation developing, and no appreciation of that, didn't seem to care	some of that is down to you, sometimes you're looking for a clear steer and sometimes they don't give you a clear steer, they'll say 'well it's really down to you and how you feel about it', and you think 'well actually I probably want a clear steer on this one' I got the impression they were prioritising that work and taking it seriously. They didn't take my concerns seriously, they didn't respond in a timely way and I had to keep chasing them, and when I did chase them I wasn't getting satisfactory answers. We got nothing back, what we did get back was 'oh well it's with our third party supplier'. They didn't own the issue. They always pushed it on to the third party, but 'yes but it's your third party, you should be on their backs, you should be pushing them'. it was this total lack of appreciation of the issue, lack of urgency to do anything about it, it was just… and this was a critical situation developing, and no appreciation of that, didn't seem to care	They didn't see it as their problem because as far as they were concerned they had a contract with the third party supplier. If the third party supplier isn't delivering it's not my fault, and I think they completely missed the point, that it is your service and it's your supplier, not my supplier.

30 : B13 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Information services Job role category = Senior	Being creative, in terms of problem solving. We all have our policies to which we adhere, but within that you have normally got a little bit of scope so I really don't want somebody who is just very black and white and not prepared to consider some alternatives, or for the long term would they take that back to their department.	I'd challenged them but it was just me, doing my thing whereas if you put somebody from procurement in the room they sit up, they take it 'oh OK, S really is annoyed', which is helpful now and again. But I sensed that she was prepared to do that, whereas in the past , it's a tender, it's a process, I'll get you through then I'm done, rather than relationship management with your suppliers.		I've also had an existing tender in which the contract isn't going well in terms of performance, and she's been really helpful in terms of clarifying for me, again with legal, how can you move it forward and make it more formal with a little bit of teeth to it, and again I've not really had that before, but then in part that was because I had a good relationship with her and I thought 'you know this isn't going very well, can you help me?'
35 : C7 Site = Site C Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Head of department		You've got to have really committed, dedicated people in registry everyone is committed to solving the problem I think what's really important is when it comes to a complicated organisation like this, if people aren't happy in their jobs or they're not motivated they can be really obstructive by not doing things or by ignoring things		So I think she's really important in that she's very patient and prepared to solve difficult problems. I think the thing with registry is that there's lots of nitty gritty problems and you have to painstakingly solve them, you can't just sweep them under the carpet. Knowledge, I mean, and willingness to deal with stuff, unpick things, do the detail. everyone is committed to solving the problem
41 : C10 Site = Site C Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Humanities Job role category = Head of department			If you took a contract round you knew it would be dealt with, and she personally would answer your emails If anything goes wrong I'm the one who has to go and see the finance officer at the EU, and unless I do every bit of finance myself I have no faith that things will not go wrong.	Stress, it's stress. It causes you a lot of stress because it's the frustration of not being able to solve that problem because it's not really your problem and you can't fix it and that person is not giving what you need, and you know that you're the one who is going to be held to account, because your name is on that piece of paper, and that's very stressful as a PI.

42 : C1 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Operations manager		complete lack of appreciation and understanding. They don't care. That's how I feel. They don't care about what they've done to the other bits of the business.	Why on earth does it take both of us to make Finance do the right thing by the student? And not once did anybody say 'I'm so sorry this department has let you down, has let the student down, and that you are still having to chase this'. There's no accountability. It's almost like 'we do enough of a good job, don't question us'. If there is no accountability, and if the individuals don't care, and if the managers don't care, then why should they?	it's about resolving issues, and that's nice because I like to work in a proactive manner, so I don't wait for things to go wrong, but try to avoid them going wrong in the first place because that creates more work. it had an immediate impact on my workload, and solved an issue that in the past we'd just accepted was part and parcel of what we did. I just want solutions - if it gets to me then it's been a problem for a student and it's not being resolved in the usual manner.
43 : C15 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	some of it tends to be a bit remote, and tends to be reactive rather than proactive.	I would say it's all very well intentioned, I don't think there is any part or any service I receive that doesn't set out to give a good service one just got the impression when it wasn't working that this was not something that they felt terribly engaged with despite that being their role. I think the willingness to engage with the subject matter, which can be a bit difficult to grasp. I wouldn't expect them to be specialists, but in the good examples there has been a greater willingness to engage with that	He takes on responsibilities beyond his remit taking on a lot more responsibility than some of his colleagues	They have sat with us, they are eager, they are friendly, they make themselves available to other people within our research centre, so that if somebody asks me a question I can turn round and say 'this person will help you', and it's always done willingly. I try not to abuse that service, some of them can be so willing that they'll spend a little bit too much time doing things which are slightly incidental to their role and sometimes I'll need to review that.

44 : C2 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	it wasn't that they were incompetent, absolutely not, but it was the extra bits that I would have expected to come with that he didn't provide.	The less good relationships - is it just a job to them? Did they really care about us? I don't think so actually, they were just given the job to do and they just had to get on and do it. And OK you can't expect everyone to care about things in the way that you do, but actually as a client which is what I was to them…	someone like R to my mind has stuck with it, hasn't passed the buck, hasn't just said it's too complicated and hasn't know what to do and passed it back to me. They've worked through it and we've tried a way which didn't work and we've both admitted it didn't work and we tried different things, so it meant that we both put the effort in to making things work because actually I wanted it to work for the Centre and she wanted it to work because it takes the university forward and its where we need to be. Yes absolutely, and you start to feel like a little bit of a broken record, 'I have a list of things here, how are we getting on with x y and z?', and he'd say 'yes they're on my list'. And there were all sorts of excuses - well there we go, they felt like excuses, they didn't feel like they were real things, and probably as a result of that it felt like he was saying he had to get agreement from someone and now they're out of the office and now there's a delay…	there were all sorts of excuses - well there we go, they felt like excuses, they didn't feel like they were real things, and probably as a result of that it felt like he was saying he had to get agreement from someone and now they're out of the office and now there's a delay…

48 : C12 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Central administrative Job role category = Manager	It means everything. It's quality and value, it's actually value, I mean as a service user you want to see the value-add for what you get. You expect the norm, you expect the basic services, but you also want to get a feel for anything that can be added that will make the experience, the interaction with them more valuable.	when you know that when you see services working their socks off to get it right, and then you see services who are just not making the effort, and also when they take the shrug of your shoulders attitude as well, it just really makes you angry. What are you being paid to do!!?	She listened, she listened and acted more than anything else. Because some people will listen and not do anything about it, and she listened and acted, that was the biggest thing. Although there were certain key heads of departments and areas it was very fragmented, and it was quite difficult. Part of the frustration of that relationship was trying to pin down who I could speak to to get the problem solved. You'd get passed from pillar to post, you don't know who to go to, and even if you do go to an individual it was like 'not my problem'.	she came in with a completely different mind-set, her background was very different, she had worked in universities, she knew the university culture, and her approach was 'OK how can we make this work for both'. I spend so much of my time troubleshooting and sorting things out.
49 : C6 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Central administrative Job role category = Manager	she comes back with suggestions and points and moves things forward, and that's what you need.	I don't think there's any particular process driving her, she just wants to give good customer service to us. I see despite the lack of support from resource and process that they're trying to do the right thing by us.	It's not an easy problem to solve, but I think customer service is a cultural challenge, and customer service to me means the ownership piece. And it's back to that responsibility or taking that responsibility. I feel like we have to push all the time to get things done	

Extract from Framework Matrix 4: Reciprocity and mutuality

	A : Shared interests	B : Shared values	C : Understanding	E : Reciprocity
3 : A9 Site = Site A Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Head of department	Because everyone wanted it, and because they, well I guess their motives were different because there were two competing platforms at the time and the mood of the team was that we should be pushing Moodle to become the institutional approved one. And so they were under a lot of pressure to prove that Moodle was the better system and that it was rolled out in as many departments as possible. So they had their own agenda but it was aligned I guess what makes the difference is first of all identification of a common purpose, which is easier on the operational side, so if it delivers a something like IT services or recruitment or processes around recruitment, or generating the departmental stats from strategy, whereas if you look at services like HR there is no common purpose.		I kind of know what to expect, and so I can actually tailor my request. So I know what is realistic and what isn't, and I think that's quite useful because otherwise you can ask random stuff and people have to tell you that it can't be done or whatever, so that's quite useful. we wouldn't have to do the translating, we'd be speaking the same language. That particularly true with the finance team, our local finance team is amazing.	

6 : A16 Site = Site A Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Humanities Job role category = Early career academic	I think quite often here we have that difference between the department and the centre and who is running what agenda, and I think that the professional services staff at ground level get caught in the middle of that quite regularly. I think it's probably at the very base of it, it's kind of philosophical about what we're all here for. If we're here to teach and to educate and help students achieve their best potential and all of that stuff, which I do believe but I'm aware sounds airy fairy, then we should make sure everything enables us to do that.	I think sometimes there are people in professional services who haven't come through from a university, they have just come in from - because if you work in HR you could work in HR anywhere, or in IT, you can work in IT anywhere, so the kind of mission of a university part of it that academics feel very strongly sometimes doesn't come through from professional services staff who don't necessarily have an HE background, don't have the political feelings about universities that are part of this.	So designated people, and you know that person. I don't email library@ but I email L. And that means you can build a relationship and you can have those kind of discussions and make personal connections. And they can understand what our mission is, understand what our needs are, understand that our needs might be different to chemistry's.	felt like she was a person who could help guide me through things and I could help her with stuff as well.

14 : A10 Site = Site A Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Information services Job role category = Senior manager	they worked very closely with the teams, and I think working closely with the teams on a day to day process meant that we moved away from like 'this is our plan, this is your plan' it was developing activities together, trying out activities, some of which worked some of which didn't, and really thinking about how we put things together. There was also that we both had a shared goal, I suppose of improving the student experience and caring for their well-being. So we were both looking for benefits from each other, so it's mutual benefit, mutual shared goal, we've got a good day to day working practice and they feel like part of the team. at the end of the day we are making things better for the students and that's what we all care about, or should care about, and that's what works for us really. It's like any of this theory about what a team is, if you haven't got a shared goal… essentially they are part of our team as far as I'm concerned, that works. shared goal, but then again we've all got a shared goal to improve the student experience. we'd need to have a shared vision of what we are trying to achieve	we are on the same hymn sheet and you start achieving	Once they started working here I started to have regular meetings with their line manager, but also started having catch-up meetings with them as well. I involved them in team meetings, divisional away days and what have you, and as a result of this we got a really good shared understanding. So from the outset I'd sat down and talked to them about why I thought the library should be involved in well-being services, what I saw our role as and what I saw their role as, so the overlap and how we can support each other. there's no thinking about treading on people's toes because we understand where our strengths are and what we do	We also had benefits we were looking for with each other. So for me, my guys have got a certain level of well-being knowledge, but I don't expect them to be experts, and I don't want them dealing with the hard-core stuff. But at the same time we've got the arena, we've got massive footfall and what have you, so the well-being guys are looking to engage with the students, they can benefit from our footfall and the relationships we've got already it's mutual benefit, mutual shared goal,

15 : A2 Site = Site A Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Student services Job role category = Manager		I think the fact that they completely understood the perspective that I had from being the line manager of the person, and so there was a good deal of empathy there in terms of the situation and a will for both of us to try and resolve it, so we were both facing in the same direction so that helped enormously.	that has meant that we've worked more closely, got to know each other a little bit better over that period of time. So I've had a better understanding of the pressures on that service department and on that individual in particular, as to why she would get stressed and why things were difficult and it wasn't always possible to have an answer straight away. So I think that has probably enhanced our ability to work together going forward as a result of the literally almost daily contact we were having at one stage about the particular situation that we were dealing with. I think the fact that they completely understood the perspective that I had from being the line manager of the person, and so there was a good deal of empathy there in terms of the situation and a will for both of us to try and resolve it, so we were both facing in the same direction so that helped enormously. if something has gone well and you've developed a good relationship because there is good mutual understanding between the two of you, then you're much more likely to trust in that person again if you understand each other, you get a better understanding of how they operate, that's really helpful in gaining an understanding of their frustrations and their pressures and what their needs are as well. So I think it helps cultivate understanding.	people that you could go to and ask for advice and information, and be happy to support them and provide information if they wanted it back. So you've got a series of positive, two way transactional relationships counselling, for example, is an instance where you might have a reciprocal arrangement for recruitment and selection of one another's candidates, and they need a panel chair who is impartial from their department, and if you understand each other, you get a better understanding of how they operate, that's really helpful in gaining an understanding of their frustrations and their pressures and what their needs are as well. So I think it helps cultivate understanding. an opportunity to talk about our place in the uni, where we are and what we are supposed to do, and then explore how we can be helpful to one another and how things should be.

16 : A7 Site = Site A Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Central administrative Job role category = Senior manager	we could both see what was in the institutional interests.	People are also very student-centred and so it won't be a case of doing something that works for the institution but not for the primary customers, or something like that.	willing to engage at whatever level was needed, an ability to turn things around quickly, to understand the political situation - that there are some routes that are open and some that are not, and to kind of disregard those that would simply be unacceptable from the outset.	
21 : B7 Site = Site B Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Head of department	And I have these ridiculous… and they feel utterly ridiculous conversations where I think 'you are supposed to be marketing, you must understand	I'm comfortable that I know where we stand, that HR know where we stand and that legal know where we stand, so we will be, whatever happens, we are all on the same page. I can go to them and say this is where I am, where does this fit with the university processes, because this is where I am, this is what I think, and I feel that we all have the same view, that actually if the situation is one of those which is a bit equivocal, that could go either way, that we're all going to fall in favour of the student, and that we're all showing some compassion. So that has made a difference to staff time in terms of being involved in these things, but I think it's also had a ripple down effect on students. And those sorts of things I don't think you can put a price on them.	having that middle sort of layer that understands what's trying to be achieved centrally but also understands the local context is helpful. because you develop a relationship, that you understand them, you understand that they are in a difficult situation, but that they understand your context so they can help you think about what the central policies mean for you, but they can also translate back to central services that actually, when you're thinking across the university this might be what fits most schools but it won't fit all, and there will be schools and parts of schools where that's actually not helpful and there needs to be another way to approach things.	I wouldn't have known that without that support service. So that's been fab, and it works both ways in that I will often pick the phone up and there'll be someone from support services on the other end, and they'll say 'now J, we have a case in another school and we need someone to look at it' OK! But it works both ways, so… But that's fine, I don't have a problem with that and it can be helpful. if we're talking about the difficulties associated with the local student services, I am there saying 'actually I don't have any problems because the service that I'm getting is great, and they are supporting me as much as they possibly can', so it is about having each other's backs.

25 : B6 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	I think it's being on the same page, that's what makes the difference. Understanding that we're all heading in the same direction, albeit from slightly different quarters, and it's getting that mutual understanding of what we're trying to achieve together, as opposed to what I want and what you want, and we're going to go in opposite directions. And that's not just them - professional services understanding us - but us understanding the constraints they're working under, or the bigger legal picture or whatever it might be. But it's about understanding, isn't it? And investing some time in that understanding. All of those examples both positive and negative, that's what it boils down to, that mutual understanding of where we're collectively going, where we can help each other.	weren't quite on the same wavelength, it's being on the same page, that's what makes the difference	that individual came with a different agenda to mine, and I needed to understand that, and I got to understand it, and it worked very successfully actually we worked really constructively together, so yes it was something around trust I think, and knowing that the other party understood where I was going and vice versa. I think it's being on the same page, that's what makes the difference. Understanding that we're all heading in the same direction, albeit from slightly different quarters, and it's getting that mutual understanding of what we're trying to achieve together, as opposed to what I want and what you want, and we're going to go in opposite directions. And that's not just them - professional services understanding us - but us understanding the constraints they're working under, or the bigger legal picture or whatever it might be. But it's about understanding, isn't it? And investing some time in that understanding. All of those examples both positive and negative, that's what it boils down to, that mutual understanding of where we're collectively going, where we can help each other. you can lose that understanding and have to start again	All of those examples both positive and negative, that's what it boils down to, that mutual understanding of where we're collectively going, where we can help each other.

26 : B8 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	I think also whether people actually are interested in what you are trying to do, their level of engagement in getting a positive outcome for the school.	so you could have that conversation where you felt much closer to them and felt you had a real ally in trying to get the solution that was needed and in the best interests of the school, and for the individual as well.	I think the sense that they really understood what we were trying to do. They understood the difficulties of trying to do HR in a university, particularly performance management of academic staff, which is a very prickly situation. And a really good sense that they understood why that was difficult and what could be done within the confines of policies and procedures that we had in the university.	
27 : B3 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Social Sciences Job role category = Operations manager			Who was not only very knowledgeable about what the schools were about, and our school in particular, and very capable with both managing her team and following all of the processes that they have to do in financial management,	it's overarching bits about the culture and the community that those relationships create as a collective which makes me feel that I can do that and I really want to do that. What that then means is that I can say to R in student services 'it would be really nice if you came along to our management board so you can be there to give an update on what's happened and how things are progressing', knowing that things are still broken and need to be fixed, and she will say yes because she knows we have had these conversations and specifically that I will manage that situation for her, and watch her back

28 : B4 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Social Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	part of the reason we're all here is to solve problems, and there would always be problems but you would feel there was a culture of we're all working together, we're all pointing in the same direction, and we're all trying to solve the problems to the best benefit whether it's a student or a member of staff, whoever it is. if everyone was on message, and everybody understood what everyone was trying to do - and in an organisation of this size that's very difficult - but actually those key things, can we please just all point in the right direction, and if all those functions were doing those things, it would be great, we'd be much more efficient. really for me it's all about understanding. The more you understand how a unit works or how people operate and what their pressure points are it immediately helps to cut across some of these border issues, and actually understands that everyone is trying to pull in the same direction.	on your wave-length or understanding your context	understanding each other's point of view it gave me a much better understanding of what I needed to look for, what I needed to look at and what I needed to do as a result of that. Yes, it was really, really positive. So it's building some kind of level of personal relationship with somebody, understanding the context - them understanding the context that you're working in and you understanding the context that they're working in. I just think that it's really important that all the professional service people spend time in the schools but also that people in the schools and faculties have the opportunity to - even if it's just a day in an office that they liaise with regularly - just to see what their perspective is. The more you understand how a unit works or how people operate and what their pressure points are it immediately helps to cut across some of these border issues, and actually understands that everyone is trying to pull in the same direction.	I suppose there was a culture, we both sort of thanked each other.

34 : C16 Site = Site C Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Senior academic	I find it difficult to see registry and academia as being on the same team at the moment, and back in 2012 we were all working together		his level of understanding was properly deep in what we've done, so I guess if I didn't know the answer and he didn't know the answer then there probably wasn't an answer and we'd develop something to answer it. we developed a very good relationship, and I knew what he needed to know, and so I could send stuff to him	
41 : C10 Site = Site C Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Humanities Job role category = Head of department	I feel sorry for marketing, because all marketing want to do is make everybody corporate and look the same, and all the research centres want to do is stand out and be different, and they're told to be niche.	if you value hard workers and you're the sort of person that will give that reciprocity in making sure you answer things on time, then you value that in others. And if you see that same sort of person it's a really good match. It's when other people have different work ethics then it's an issue	I can say straight away that the person that works with me all the time is a really positive experience, because it's very face to face, it's very personal, we know each other's jobs, so she knows the pressures that I'm under and I know the pressures that she's under. So we just get so much more done. if you are that person's line manager or you're working one-to-one with them, then you can see day to day what they're doing, how their family life balance is working out, and you make a judgement about that, you think 'well I won't give them that bit of work to do because I can see they're already overloaded'	although she wasn't co-located, we had that personal relationship, and so also if you value hard workers and you're the sort of person that will give that reciprocity in making sure you answer things on time, then you value that in others. And if you see that same sort of person it's a really good match. sometimes you ask them to do things which are not in their job description, but in a way that works because then when they ask you if they can work at home because of family issues or whatever then you'll completely understand because you know that they'll carry on and do that work in the evening. And the other way around, if they ask you for something, then you give them that attention and information straight away because you value them and what they're doing.

43 : C15 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	And you got the feeling that we're part of a team, we're working hard on this, we've all got to put the hours in but we're part of a team.		because they are there and because we know each others' working practices, I guess we all adapt to each others' modus operandi, and that does very much enable those relationships to work much more smoothly I think the willingness to engage with the subject matter, which can be a bit difficult to grasp. I wouldn't expect them to be specialists, but in the good examples there has been a greater willingness to engage with that, and understand what it's about, rather than just seeing themselves as a remote function. I think it would be a lot more communicative anyway because we would understand each other's issues and each other's pending or imminent issues much more efficiently. You pick things up, not that you're there to earwig, but it's simply getting talking about things. I just happened to be there at the Techno Centre and rather than walk somewhere else I stayed there, and I found that pleasant, pleasing, and enabled me to appreciate how they work and what kind of relationships are going on there. And having an insight into how people do work together is fascinating.	because it's me asking they'll do it, because they know that they'll get a quid pro quo back from me, at some time. I can turn to these people very quickly, I can make a quick phone call if they're not in the room and say 'I've got such and such an issue, can you help me', or 'can you help one of my academics to do something'. And because it's me asking they'll do it We're all busy but I will invest more time in the people I know and trust, and be willing to give them that extra half an hour and have a coffee.

44 : C2 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	feeling like that person is actually supporting your requirements and the things that you're trying to get to. Ultimately we're all trying to make the university a better place, and I think people who have been really positive I felt really got us, what we were trying to do and why we were trying to do it. The less good relationships - is it just a job to them? Did they really care about us? I don't think so actually, they were just given the job to do and they just had to get on and do it. And OK you can't expect everyone to care about things in the way that you do, but actually as a client which is what I was to them…		And I think then as a result of it we built up a really good working relationship so that she'd know I would only phone and hassle her if it was urgent and necessary, I wouldn't be on the phone all the time, and similarly if she asked me to do something it was because it really needed doing. now we've changed who we're working with, and that for me is a massive step back, so I feel like I don't know the new lady particularly at all, so now I've got to work with her to understand, and that's a particular relationship that is so important in getting things done, and I have to get back to her and get to know her properly and her us. feeling like that person is actually supporting your requirements and the things that you're trying to get to. Ultimately we're all trying to make the university a better place, and I think people who have been really positive I felt really got us, what we were trying to do and why we were trying to do it. communication has got to be a the heart of things, which is why it's a people game and building up relationships with people and them understanding where you're coming from is absolutely critical.	she'd know I would only phone and hassle her if it was urgent and necessary, I wouldn't be on the phone all the time, and similarly if she asked me to do something it was because it really needed doing. if I didn't build a relationship with somebody I wouldn't get things done as quickly as I needed to get things done, and sometimes you are pushing boundaries and trying to get things done, calling in favours - I do an awful lot of that, because sometimes you can't help it, and something has come in last minute. But if it was just emailing someone that I had no idea of, it would look like just another request that had popped on their pile. But sometimes you need to phone someone and say 'look I know you're really busy and I wouldn't ask you unless I really urgently needed it', and I think that relationship is absolutely critical.

48 : C12 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Central administrative Job role category = Manager	my approach with the professional services is always to work in partnership with them, and my approach is that we are all trying to achieve literally the same thing, we're trying to achieve a successful outcome for Coventry University. Because it's the partnership working, we're all professional services, and even if I wasn't, we are all trying to achieve an end goal, and it's that partnership working that I think helps to move things better than any antagonistic toing and froing. The sense that you're working together on a common goal.		I go into the relationship with them with a bit of an empathetic approach, in that I know the challenges they face, I face the same challenges, they know that if I contact them to complain, it's bad, because it's got to that point, because they know that I will try to deal with things beforehand. So if I've got to the point of complaining or escalating then they know it's bad. It's not that I'm a horrible person, but it's that they know I will try to get things resolved without escalating if it can at all be avoided. I think that in order to be able to get that respect that you want from your customers, that partnership relationship, you have to work with them and be there, be present, have time, spend time together to understand each other's issues and challenges so that when you're dealing with the challenges your empathy will enable you to action it in a way that helps them more	I'd come with any issues or concerns that I had that weren't urgent at that time, or feedback in relation to services or what had gone wrong, and she'd do the same. So in terms of my team and how we'd interact and things that we can do to make things easier, and that's how we'd work. The relationship was good because we met, we talked, we shared and that worked.

Extract from Framework Matrix 5: Value co-creation, co-operation and collaboration

	A : Collaboration	D : Info sharing	E : Value co-creation	F : Creativity
4 : A15 Site = Site A Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Social Sciences Job role category = Early career academic	it's also been sort of navigating how the roles evolve and how we can work together. And discovering as well what can be done by one person rather than the other, and also working out where we make decisions about things, that that can be done jointly but also supported. It's been an interesting one, and a valuable experience as well because we've also sort of reflected on what needs to change, we've had meetings.		It's been an interesting one, and a valuable experience as well because we've also sort of reflected on what needs to change, we've had meetings. That person has then proactively gone about finding ways to improve systems and develop processes so that we've learnt from anything that didn't go quite as we would have hoped at the time. So it's been quite an evolving relationship that you know, started off from not really quite knowing what the other person's role was from my point of view.	
13 : A4 Site = Site A Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Social Sciences Job role category = Operations	And a sense of working together on shared problems With the business partner who is somebody who you feel is as committed to the success of the organisation as you are, and who will work with you and listen to what you say and help you to achieve what you want to achieve.	have every confidence in the information she gives us	The sense that she'll help us find a pragmatic way through that isn't going to land us in hot water down the line. We need to get things done, and sometimes you need to be flexible or use your imagination in the way that you apply principles, but it has to be defensible. And she helps us to think that through so you feel like you're getting to what will be a good solution that will be robust and you're not getting yourself into trouble. It's an element of being an expert and guiding you through it.	

14 : A10 Site = Site A Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Information services Job role category = Senior manager	it's partly how you work together, and the only way we achieved this stuff with the students is by working with the well-being guys because we don't have enough members of staff to do all the stuff we wanted to. we've got so much to achieve and there's no way that we could achieve all of the stuff we wanted to just with my small team.		they worked very closely with the teams, and I think working closely with the teams on a day to day process meant that we moved away from like 'this is our plan, this is your plan' it was developing activities together, trying out activities, some of which worked some of which didn't, and really thinking about how we put things together. So we were both looking for benefits from each other, so it's mutual benefit, mutual shared goal, we've got a good day to day working practice and they feel like part of the team.	
16 : A7 Site = Site A Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Central administrative Job role category = Senior manager	we were able to work together to wring the maximum learning I was convening because everything needed to be done in the name of that office, but he understood the practical implications and was very adept at feeding in information, so that I was enabled to play the role that I had to. It was kind of symbiotic in that sense. There's a sense of being able to work as a team, not within your operational unit but genuinely across office boundaries.	very adept at feeding in information, so that I was enabled	we were able to work together to wring the maximum learning out of the experience. So he had strong expertise, was a very good communicator, he was able to spend the time, he had a similar mind set but was equally able to challenge some of my assumptions and overcome some of my areas of ignorance by complementary knowledge.	
19 : B1 Site = Site B Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category =	And they are extremely good - if you want to talk about how to do things they come along and they are open to the suggestions we make and the changes we want to make at a faculty level, and generally working with us.		So we had a meeting and we'd discuss it, and we came up with this is what we want to do as a faculty, we'll have contact here and contact there and we just talked to each other and made things work. And that helped hugely from our point of view.	

20 : B2 Site = Site B Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Head of department		they are very important because they are the people who have a strong view of the national picture that perhaps I wouldn't have because they go to the right conferences so they see the national picture for research funding, they know what's coming, that kind of thing.	I think for those high level ones its advice and bouncing strategic ideas off and getting a sense check if I'm doing something mad or not. With that type of relationship you can push the boundaries a bit, you can say things, and the answer you get is of value in understanding what it is you're doing, does it make sense. I thought this is great, I've got people who know what they're doing. Now that course will be the hub for three or four courses from other schools. So from that small idea and making it real and turning it into something important for us is potentially going to be important for other schools as well, so it's been listed in the UK government as the top 5 interactions with China, and we got to the Times Higher awards. And international office were absolutely integral to that.	at the moment good things don't happen, so we don't do things beyond what needs to be done, and that's a problem for a school like ours

21 : B7 Site = Site B Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Head of department	we found a way where we were agreed that we would move forward in this way. Now I couldn't have done that without their help and advice we did all have to manage it and we had to manage it now, and we did all come together to do that, and that was really helpful. Unlike other circumstances I did feel that actually they appreciated that this was both business critical and time-sensitive. What we've done since we moved into the student service format is that myself and my head of ops meet every month with the student services leads, and we come with a list but we've built that relationship. So we come with a list and coffee and biscuits, and we work through them, and they'll be able to help on some things she knows exactly what's going on everywhere, and we spend a lot of time together, and I do feel that unlike relationships between head of ops and head of school in the past which have always been very cordial and friendly, I do feel that we run the school together. I don't run the school, I couldn't do without her, we run the school together.		We talked about how it might play out, whether we should think about making a payment to this particular person to make them go away. What the reputational damage to the university or the school might be if it ended up in court, and all of those issues, and we found a way where we were agreed that we would move forward in this way. Now I couldn't have done that without their help and advice I've been able to develop with their support, processes which mean that we are effectively dealing with complaints and appeals that come in, we're dealing with them in a timely manner, that actually we have a consistency of outcome which we didn't necessarily have before. So all of that is really helpful too, and they are always at the end of the phone. If something comes in and I ring them and say 'I've just had this email', and they'll say 'what you need to do is…' So that's really helpful, and having had a really difficult patch early on and putting these things in place, and started the ball rolling and getting a small team together so we've got consistency, actually we're getting less and less of these complaints and appeals, we've had training for module leaders and things, and actually the situation is improving.	

23 : B10 Site = Site B Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Social Sciences Job role category = Mid career academic	I feel as if we've kind of developed how we work together, rather than one of us try and make the other do things in a particular way. It's symbiotic really, it's synergises it's her efficiency, it's her initiative, it is the relationship, the whole thing works together really.		she and I are now going to be co co-ordinators for equality diversity and inclusion, and I really like that the school has decided that it's good to have an academic and an APM together, and we're confident that our relationship is such that that will work and I'm looking forward to that because she'll bring a different insight to me and that's good.	
24 : B5 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category =	She'll also proactively works with us, so she might hear of some agenda changing and she'll let us know. So we work quite closely in a partnership, if that makes sense.	She'll also proactively works with us, so she might hear of some agenda changing and she'll let us know. So we work quite closely in a partnership, if that makes sense.	She's part of us and part of our success.	
26 : B8 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	we're more a team.	both of our jobs become easier, because I can say to you 'so we're having a bit of an issue with this', and you can say 'oh well that member of staff is an absolute nightmare, you know the way to handle them better is to do this'. They are not going to go back and say 'K says that so and so is a nightmare' they'll say 'OK, an approach that we might take to interact with this particular member of staff is this', so you don't have to share the piece of information directly, but it shapes the way you do your job and makes it easier and better. But you've got to build that relationship first.		

27 : B3 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Social Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	for the whole system to work together.		She would help us to be more informed in order to make the right strategic decisions, so yes, and you could have completely candid communications with her. The interaction, we could just open up a dialogue, and it might be a bit of to-ing and fro-ing, iteratively on the phone or face to face or email, but I could just launch into it and it helped short cut things. the other benefit would be initiation in both directions of improvements or changes, the challenge of why are we doing this, could we be doing it better, are we doing the right thing, all of that. And then I think the other thing is about once you've got those relationships, you become aware of what other knowledge, connections and networks that person has	It kind of quells creativity and that desire to improve because at times you just basically can't be bothered, and it slips down the list or it's too hard, and you just literally don't have the capacity to do it, and it ends up in the not important and urgent box in the nice to do until it goes completely pear shaped.

30 : B13 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Information services Job role category = Senior manager	So we worked together a lot more then, and I was trying to give my finance manager an understanding of where we were coming from in terms of the service, and she was trying to educate me in the financial facts of life in negotiation which was totally, you know, I found it a very different mind-set to get into, because my whole career has been about providing a service and problem solving. working with IT colleagues, libraries and IT go together very closely, so where we get to work well together there I feel that brings real benefit to the students, and that's my main focus not just professional services, but how you work together. an ability to get good solutions to problems relatively quickly, but I think more around being able to move your service forward, develop it, get somebody else's point of view and ideas, well where's this going then, did you know we're doing this, and you think well that will allow me to do that and can we work together on it.		Them listening to where you're coming from, so that coming together of both your sets of skills, so it's not a lecture on purely from their point of view or purely from my point of view, you're trying to accommodate both and come to the best solution you can. it's still hard but we have got I'm sure better results than we would have done if I'd just gone in on my own or if she hadn't felt able to give that advice So particularly IT, working with IT colleagues, libraries and IT go together very closely, so where we get to work well together there I feel that brings real benefit to the students, and that's my main focus, so that's always really useful. she was new to this but came with lots of ideas, many of which weren't really doable once we'd talked together, but it just allowed me to think about well we could think about that a bit differently, and we're tendering this year and we're going to take a different approach to see if we get a different kind of company helping us. So she's worked hard on this to think about where we go with it, rather than just thinking OK you need a tender shaped like this and away you go. She's definitely more thinking longer term and strategically rather than previous experiences I'd had which were OK, you need to tender, here's the form, here's the process and get you through. So that was good.	

31 : B9 Site = Site B Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Student services Job role category = Manager	I was working with the recruitment team in HR in a different way than I had been before. But that's when I found that I was going over to HR to talk to them, and between us we thought of some really innovative ways to recruit and to select, and they've invited me to be part of the pilot of a new way of recruiting. But I hadn't dealt with any of these people before, they weren't my named contact, they were the recruitment experts, and I think that's what made this so successful. I wasn't going through my named contact to get to the experts. We were working together all of us, collaboratively, to get the best result for the recruitment process. It was a team, so I could expect an answer from any of the members of the team and they all knew the situation. We've just rolled out Office 365 and they had never used it before, so we set up an office 365 group for the recruitment so we were all, you know… You'd think it was so revolutionary, it's so simple, but we're all working off the same document, we're all looking at the same list that's pulled off at the same time. So if I want to check the advert we'd put it on there, so all these things.	But it's so different to what I'd done before, so the team were involved and the team had access to this office 365. Although there were two main players that I spoke to, any of them could have picked it up, and we all knew where we were, we all knew where the information was, so it made quite a difference.	I was working with the recruitment team in HR in a different way than I had been before. But that's when I found that I was going over to HR to talk to them, and between us we thought of some really innovative ways to recruit and to select, and they've invited me to be part of the pilot of a new way of recruiting. But I hadn't dealt with any of these people before, they weren't my named contact, they were the recruitment experts, and I think that's what made this so successful. I wasn't going through my named contact to get to the experts. We were working together all of us, collaboratively, to get the best result for the recruitment process. did what I asked but in a knowledgeable way, so I might say I want to do this, but they would turn it into what via HR I have to do, and 'you gave me the thing but in draft, here it is in HR lingo and I've changed some of the wording so that it's not gender specific' and all this sort of stuff. They took what I gave them but then applied their professional eye on it,	different ways of doing things, and finding better ways to get through the necessary loopholes I know now that they are so open to ideas, and they're not going to go 'no, we don't do it like that', so I'd dare be a little bit more adventurous.

35 : C7 Site = Site C Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Head of department	if you haven't got good team work it all falls apart		And just the sense of you're more motivated if you've got a team and you feel that your team is able to problem solve, and everybody is inputting to solving the problem, everyone is committed to solving the problem, and are more motivated, more confident, able to then take advantage of new opportunities.	If you feel like there's a problem you can't solve you start to shut down on opportunities, as you think 'we can't solve that so we can't possibly look at this development or that initiative', so it really stifles innovation if you're not supported in solving the problems or you don't feel than anybody is listening, you get the attitude of 'no, we're not in a position to do this now or to move forward'. if you have anything that threatens your core business and your support services aren't helping then you're not going to do any innovation.
37 : C11 Site = Site C Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Social Sciences Job role category = Head of department	it's great fun working together And then if there's a problem and we have to find a solution we're both quite creative, not to say deviant, and we find ways and that's good.		It means that it can be quite spontaneous on both sides, so we can discuss things together either here or as we drive back to the city, and it comes up quite spontaneously because it's an ongoing process. I think C is involved in most important decisions apart from personal stuff that I have to keep confidential, but she is involved in most of the decisions and increasingly so. I think it's because we know how each other works and it's a nice partnership, it really is.	I think rather than being defensive, rather than fire-fighting, we could move to a higher level and be much more proactive, inventive, creative. I do not think though that more repressive approaches that constantly refer to rules and regulations and have a kind of policing or unsupportive way, although it can also be because they are understaffed. Maybe we should talk about that separately, because I think that's a real constraint. I think it you got rid of all that you can go so much further in nurturing creativity. I think research suffers and people suffer under the weight of all these rules that constrain them. It's not the best approach for husbanding creativity, so there may be an impact on research, or how long people stay because of staff retention, people get frustrated if they feel unsupported.

38 : C8 Site = Site C Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Social Sciences Job role category = Head of department	I think they've probably been used to working together in that way because the person in the library was quite up to speed with the open journal system, and the person in IT had worked on the open journal system for this previous journal, so the previous experience set the scene for another journal being published by the university, so they were already aware of what needed to happen and the sticking points and the complexities.	I think you can be more effective, more efficient, so just having those networks to draw on, knowing what's going on. Because we're a very complex organisation so having people that you know in different areas that you might bump into who can update you and tell you what's going on. I think that makes you keep abreast of what's happening, and it helps you to make connections. So sometimes if you think 'so and so mentioned that over there, and something is happening over here', you can kind of connect those two things and it might be that you can introduce people to one another	so the journal is now in something like its fourth year and I couldn't have done that without the help of both ITS and the library Their expertise - there was absolutely no way I could have done that myself. Even now the DOI system is quite complex, but I'm quite good at just saying that will get dealt with, things that I'm not ever going to grapple with, some of the technical aspects of the journal, but that's fine, I don't need to do that, and I trust that it will get done. I'm a great one for if I give somebody responsibility for something I just expect them to do it. So from that point of view it's the expertise, it's having someone who you can just say 'help!', and having them come back and say 'I'll have a look, I'll sort it out'. So it's the expertise, the ability to go to them with problems, and to go to them to say 'how can we make this better?' and for them to have the knowledge to feed into the process.	it just crushed all the creativity out of the whole meeting
40 : C5 Site = Site C Staff type = Academic Field or discipline = Humanities Job role category = Senior academic			it was decided to run a conference and nobody seemed to be doing anything. So basically myself and an admin colleague organised it. So we both worked hard, we were both on the same wavelength, knew what we were doing more or less, bounced ideas off each other and the conference was a success. So that's an example where I could never have done it on my own - I would never have done it on my own!	

43 : C15 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Operations manager	they'll work with me to help there. So the positive relationships just make things happen more easily	the fact that we will share information beyond our remit with each other, so if I know that there's some piece of information that is going to affect them I will share that, I will trust them that they're not going to put it on twitter and broadcast it if I say not to. But the fact that I will demonstrate that trust in them helps them to understand how much I value them. But with people that you have a positive relationship with it's a delight to talk to them, I can share difficulties with them more readily, I can confess my own shortcomings with them more readily, and they'll work with me to help there. I've mentioned trust a lot, so it would be based on that, it would be based on much more regular communication, and particularly sharing of strategies or strategic approaches. So that's an example where I think just sharing information would be much better. I'm trying to do that now more in the processes I'm putting in place in the new institute, sharing with them what our projects are and who our collaborators are, so they can help us build the relationships with them, share with the legal team when things are going to be coming down the line - if we win that bid we're going to need your services fairly quickly.	they are willing to discuss requirements with me and perhaps work to develop a solution to them with me. We spend quite a lot of time responding to requests for visits for example, from enterprise and innovation, and in that particular case where we host visits which can take an hour or two hours at short notice, and I see no outcome of this. And if we were meeting regularly and knew what their visit timetable was like we could pick and choose and say no we don't want to see that one, but that one is particularly important for us, and then shape what they do as well as help us plan our time more easily.	

44 : C2 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Sciences Job role category = Operations manager		going back to the honesty, possibly being a bit more guarded to allow her to get to know us a bit better, and for me to know how she likes to operate and the boundaries - what sort of person she is, is she someone who will push the boundaries or is she a computer says no person, and this is the way we have to do it. And therefore allowing me to understand how much or how little information I can give her.	someone like R to my mind has stuck with it, hasn't passed the buck, hasn't just said it's too complicated and hasn't know what to do and passed it back to me. They've worked through it and we've tried a way which didn't work and we've both admitted it didn't work and we tried different things, so it meant that we both put the effort in to making things work because actually I wanted it to work for the Centre and she wanted it to work because it takes the university forward and its where we need to be.	And come up with ideas, my god - if someone could come and say 'we were talking about that the other day, I thought this might be of interest to you.' I don't think I've ever experienced that where a service has gone above and beyond where they've taken into consideration what we're trying to do and 'actually I've thought about this something that you haven't even thought about', that would be an amazing place to be.
46 : C17 Site = Site C Staff type = Professional Services Field or discipline = Information services Job role category = Manager	They will arrange to come and see me or I'll go and see them so we can have a face to face conversation, walk the building, decide what we're going to do with certain things, and work collaboratively. I think with those positive working relationships - I'm sitting on lots of working groups at the minute for various Estates projects - it's just about learning something new as well. You can learn from them, they can learn from you, and it's about respecting each other's expertise as well.		he regularly checks in with me to see how a particular thing is going, any issues, and when I said 'we've got a real issue with this particular thing', he's gone out and sourced an alternative, and then said 'right, let's do this as a trial, try this and make it work'. So from my point of view as a customer that's really worked, because it's really progressed. It's given me other options I think it enhances you professionally, because people come up with ideas that you may not have thought about, you know from other people so it improves your skills, so you can see 'oh so and so is using that piece of software', or 'oh I'd never thought of doing it like that' and I think having those different points of view are really important to stop you being siloed.	I think it enhances you professionally, because people come up with ideas that you may not have thought about, you know from other people so it improves your skills, so you can see 'oh so and so is using that piece of software', or 'oh I'd never thought of doing it like that' and I think having those different points of view are really important to stop you being siloed.

Appendix 11: Research Report

POOR RELATIONS?
THE WORK RELATIONSHIPS OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONAL SERVICES STAFF

Research Report

Abstract

This research study examines how service quality in university professional services is influenced by the quality of work relationships on campus. It offers an evidence-base for university managers to inform decisions about the organisation of internal resources and effective support service provision, taking into account the ways in which relationships between colleagues influence service quality.

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Executive Summary

1. This research study offers an evidence-base for university managers to inform decisions about the organisation of internal resources and effective support service provision. Given the investment that the higher education sector makes in support staff who constitute 51% of the UK university workforce, and the importance of effective working relationships across institutions in adapting to organisational challenges, a deeper understanding of the contribution and dynamics of co-operative relationships between colleagues may help institutions to capitalise on the strengths of all their staff.

2. Qualitative research was conducted in three English universities in the UK midlands region, with 50 staff interviewed across the three sites, with an even split between academic and non-academic participants. Participants were asked to discuss their experiences of their working relationships with professional services staff on whom they relied for support, and to reflect on the outcomes of their interactions. Data collection took place between January and July 2018.

3. Main findings
   - Whilst professional services are often inward-facing, internal service quality influences the quality of service universities provide to their external customers.
   - The costs and benefits of relationship strength can be quantified through effects on performance, productivity, retention and staff wellbeing, with both individual and institutional consequences.
   - Strong relationships bring tangible benefits, and poor relationships have quantifiable costs. The absence of an interpersonal relationship (such as when the service model is an impersonal portal or resource account) can have the same costs as a poor relationship due to the loss of opportunity to generate value through a trusted, co-operative connection.
   - Organisational context influences how relationships are framed, but strong interpersonal relationships can mitigate the negative consequences of organisational constraints. However, organisational structures cannot fix poor relationships.
   - Shared understandings, common values and mutual interests are the bedrock of effective internal service relationships, as colleagues view their efforts as pulling in the same direction, even if their contributions are different.
   - Professional services staff are strongly valued as colleagues where they bring specialist expertise, help with administrative and bureaucratic burdens and use their initiative and problem-solving skills to take responsibility for delivering desired outcomes in partnership with their customers.

4. Key themes
   Five prevalent themes emerging from this study capture the dynamics of workplace relationships and the ways in which service quality is influenced and perceived. These themes were apparent across the data from all three sites.

   - **Competence, efficacy and performance:** Staff competence, specialist expertise and professionalism was frequently a precursor to the development of a trusted relationship, and such interpersonal relationships based on confident expectations of

performance enhanced the efficiency of service exchange and boosted the personal efficacy of staff accessing those services. Poor quality relationships significantly compromised the productivity of staff as they spent time chasing support or doing the work themselves, could be detrimental to organisational performance, including in financial terms, and negatively affected staff morale and motivation.

- **Bureaucracy, rules and discretion:** Professional services staff were valued when they used their specialist expertise to navigate institutional processes and regulations, and reduce the administrative burden for their colleagues. Where bureaucracy could not be avoided or created detrimental unintended consequences, staff expected professional services colleagues to intelligently apply the rules, using their judgement, discretion and institutional know-how to find appropriate solutions. Participants were especially frustrated when staff assumed a policing rather than an enabling attitude, typified by a 'computer says no' mind-set.

- **Ownership, problem resolution and engagement:** Staff valued the commitment and dedication of their colleagues in tenaciously seeking solutions, in being prepared to make decisions, and to see an issue through to resolution. Ownership was seen as an indicator of professionalism and a willingness to be accountable to professional standards.

- **Mutuality and reciprocity:** Shared goals, values and interests were found to be of critical importance in the development of effective co-operative working relationships which generated goodwill and reciprocal behaviours. Poor relationships were often the result of competing priorities. Co-location was cited as a factor in fostering mutual understanding.

- **Value co-creation, co-operation and collaboration:** Relationship quality plays a significant role in fostering conducive conditions for co-operation between colleagues and the creation of value for the individual and the organisation. The generation of ideas, innovative and adaptive approaches, and creative solutions to problems were all cited as outcomes of collaborative ways of working.

5. Implications

This research provides empirical evidence to illustrate the tangible consequences of internal exchange relationships such that their contribution to individual and organisational performance can be better appreciated. The report concludes with some suggestions about how the findings can be applied in practice for the benefit of individuals and their institutions.

Findings of particular interest to HE managers include the implications of centralisation and service delivery models for the development of effective service relationships. Managers will also be interested in findings on the effects of internal service quality issues on staff productivity and performance. Implications of this study for professional services staff in HE are also set out, with a view to providing insights into how their roles and behaviours are perceived by their colleagues, and the value of investing in co-operative working relationships.

1. Purpose of study

Decision-making about the most effective ways to deliver professional service support on campus will inevitably involve consideration of structures, processes and service models, as well as cost-effectiveness and value for money. Ways of working and the interpersonal relationships between service provider and customer can be seen as secondary considerations in these matters. This study argues that relationships between colleagues are at least as important as the structures in which they operate in terms of service effectiveness.

The aim of this study was to provide empirical evidence of the significance of work relationships and explore how the strength of relationships influences the service quality of professional services in universities. It sought to understand the organisational and interpersonal factors which affect service experience, and explored the following questions:

- What factors influence the user's expectations, experience and outcomes of engagement with university professional services?
- What is the association between the interpersonal relationship and the user's perceptions of service quality?
- How does the quality of the working relationship between service provider and service user affect the user's attitudes, behaviours and actions in the longer term?

2. Research methodology

This qualitative research study sought to uncover the experience of university staff from the perspective of the 'customers' of university professional services. Participants were both academic and non-academic service users, who had ongoing relationships with service providers. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 50 staff from three institutions in the UK Midlands region between January and July 2018, and data was analysed using a thematic analysis technique. No institutions nor individuals are identifiable from the data or written reports of findings from the research. Data was anonymised to protect the identities of participating staff and institutions.

The selection criteria for participants were as follows:

- Staff who had been in their current post for at least one year.
- Staff who were in positions where service use had the potential to contribute to both operational and strategic aspects of their work. For academic staff this tended to be those who had some degree of management responsibility in addition to their academic role which required regular engagement with a professional service, for example as a Head of School, Director of Admissions or Course Director. For non-academic staff, individuals who operated at a strategic level or had responsibility for delivering a particular function were sought.
- Staff who relied on internal services to be able to carry out their responsibilities to their own customers, whether these were other staff, students or external stakeholders.

In addition to the criteria for the selection of individual cases, the sampling strategy aimed to achieve a broad range of perspectives to reflect the diversity and variations within university staffing. Consistent with the proportion of staff in each category at a national level, the sampling strategy aimed to achieve an equal mix of academic and non-academic participants, and a gender balance. Participants were also selected such that the collection of cases included individuals from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, covering the three broad academic areas of science and engineering, arts and humanities and social sciences.

Figure 1: Sample characteristics: Participants' field of work

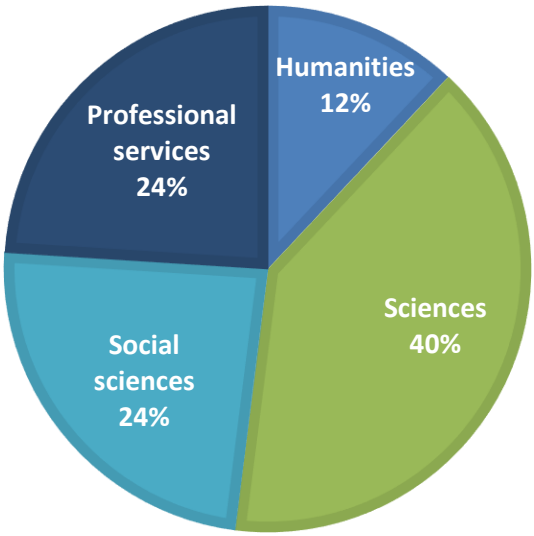
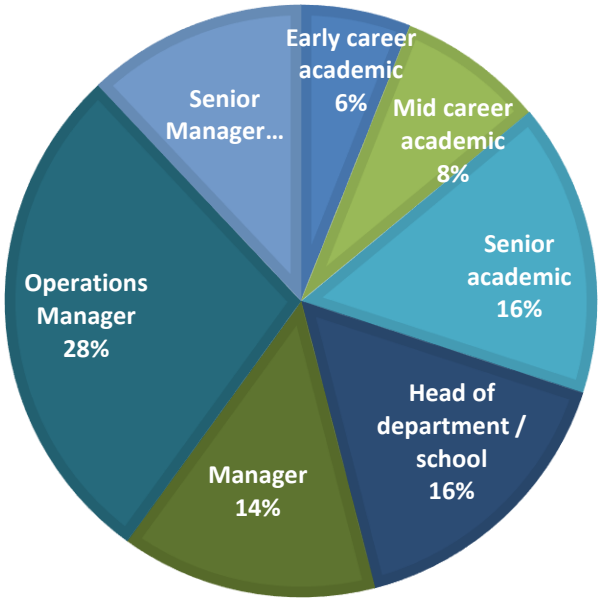


Figure 2: Sample characteristics: Participants' job role

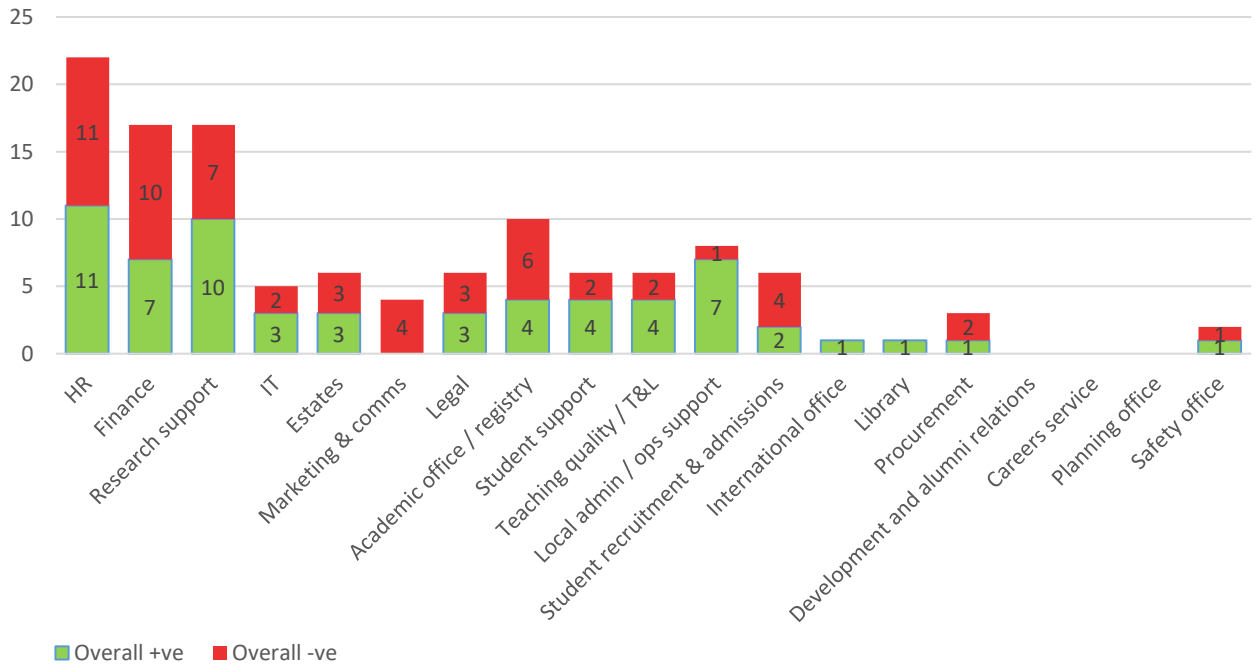


3. Overview of data

Examination of the data on the outcomes of interpersonal relationships provides powerful evidence as to why these matter in the HE workplace. The costs of poor relationships and the value of strong relationships are evidenced in this data, with implications at individual and institutional levels. In all cases, participants confirmed that how they subsequently engaged with professional services colleagues would be influenced by their service experiences, and that they would adjust their attitudes, behaviours and expectations as a result.

Participants were asked to describe their experiences of positive and productive working relationships, as well as those which were less than positive. The services most frequently referred to were human resources and finance support functions, followed by research support, IT support, estates, marketing and legal services. Services which were notably positively viewed were local support services, whilst services which were notably negatively viewed included student recruitment, marketing and finance support.

Figure 3: Services cited in positive and negative relationship experience examples



3.1 General view

At the start of each interview, each participant was asked to give their general view of the quality of professional support services at their institution, in order to ascertain their prior perceptions and general expectations. Views were mixed (26 out of 50 responses), in that there was seen to be large variations across campus, or positive (19 responses), with only five participants at Site C taking a predominantly negative view.

Figure 4: General view of professional service quality by site

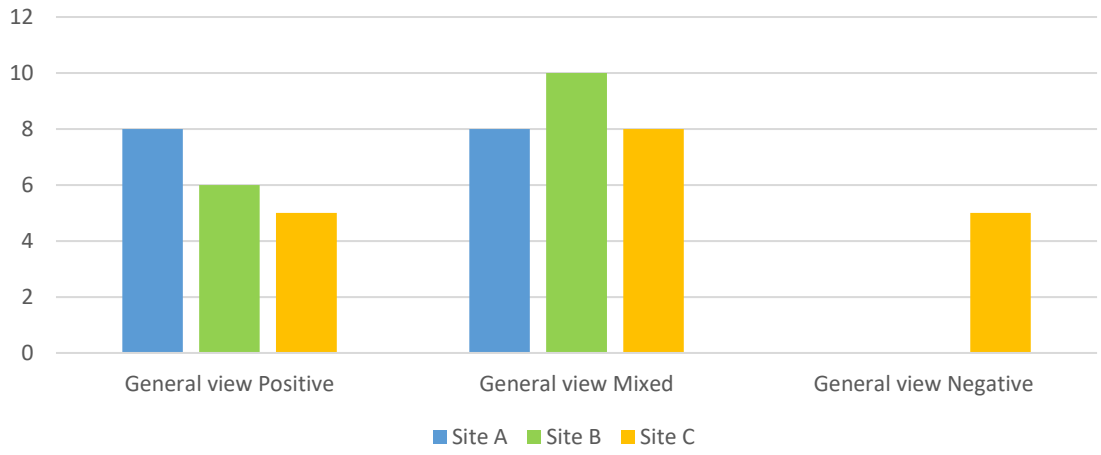
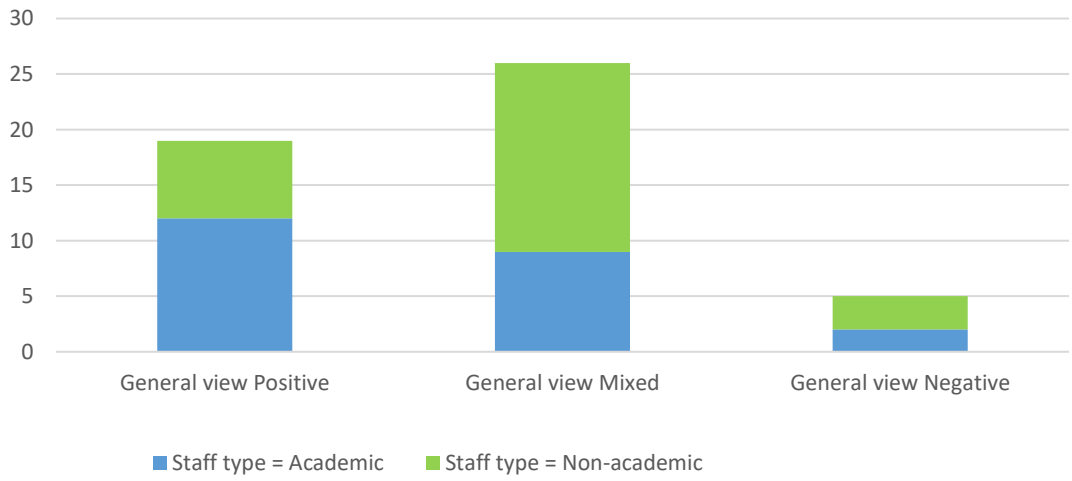


Figure 5: General view of professional service quality by staff type



- Twice as many academic staff participants were positive in their appraisal than non-academic staff, and non-academic staff were primarily of a mixed view.
- Positive views referred to the professionalism, specialist expertise and critical support provided by professional service colleagues, recognising their own dependence on these support services.
- Participants who viewed service quality as mixed described situations where some services delivered strongly whilst others struggled to meet expectations and where individuals were well-regarded but their service was seen to be extremely stretched.
- The nature of the individual relationship was often viewed as a determining factor in how the service as a whole was performing. Even when negative views were expressed, participants appreciated that in some cases individuals were working in difficult circumstances.

3.2 Characteristics of strong working relationships

Examples given by participants of positive and productive working relationships with professional services colleagues were characterised by:

- Competence, specialist skills, know-how and professionalism of professional services staff;
- Reliability of service and confidence in professional staff to deliver as needed;
- Taking of initiative and use of problem-solving behaviours to anticipate and mitigate risks;
- Effective communication and clarity about service standards and how to engage help;
- Responsiveness and adaptability to the needs of the customer;
- Assumption of ownership and responsibility where appropriate;
- Recognition of the complementarity of academic and non-academic skill-sets and expertise, with better outcomes delivered as a result of such collaboration;
- Use of discretion and the use of intelligent, expert judgement in difficult or sensitive situations, especially where the interests of an external customer such as a student were compromised by an institutional approach;
- The sense of a common purpose, mutual understanding and shared ownership of problems, with alignment between service provider and customer;
- High levels of trust established through forging a personal connection and rapport;
- Professional services staff as valued colleagues who provided succour and moral support as well as practical solutions to challenges faced.

3.3 Characteristics of poor working relationships

Examples of unproductive and more strained working relationships with professional services colleagues were characterised by:

- Frustration and annoyance that services did not meet their needs when that is what they are designed to do, especially when locked in to internal services such that there was no alternative;
- Time wasted as a result of service deficiencies, with significant implications for an individuals' own effectiveness and performance;
- Poor value for money from services supported by a central service charge which was levied on their departments but which was seen to be wasted on services which did not deliver the support needed;
- Absence of ownership and unwillingness to take responsibility for resolving issues either through lack of engagement or for fear of being implicated or blamed;
- Capacity issues with service providers, sometimes stemming from low staff retention;
- Poor business continuity with high staff turnover and frequent changes of key contacts;
- A lack of empowerment of support staff to use expert judgement and discretion;
- Competing priorities and agendas, and tensions between departments or staff groups;

- Incompetence, lack of skill or attention to detail as well as a lack of understanding of the implications of mistakes made;
- Limited appreciation of the customer's needs and absence of understanding of their local context, compounded with poor communication and lack of consultation;
- A lack of flexibility and the blind application of rules, regulations and policies, especially when the needs of students were seen to be compromised as an unintended consequence.

3.4 What makes the difference?

Participants were asked their views as to what factors in their experience made the difference between relationships with professional service colleagues which were predominantly positive and productive, and those which were not. Most frequently cited was personal connection, confirming that interpersonal relationships do influence perceptions of service quality. The role of individual personality and the extent to which service providers understood the needs of their colleagues were also mentioned.

Shared interests, aligned priorities and engagement with the needs of others were notable factors, along with communication, rapport and trust between colleagues. Trust was seen as an enabler which allowed relationships to develop, and trustworthiness was based on evidence of professional competence as well as personal qualities such as integrity and reliability. Trust was frequently experienced as a liberating phenomenon in that it freed participants from worry, eliminated the need to check up on colleagues' performance, and promoted information sharing and communication.

4. Key research findings

4.1 Organisational factors influencing relationship quality

The organisational context provides the backdrop to the interpersonal relationships which develop between colleagues, and this study examined the factors which were implicated in the experience of relationships with professional services staff, with both positive and negative consequences.

- ***Interdependence***
  Participants recognised that interdependence is a feature of large, complex organisations such as universities with both rewards and challenges, and that organisational risk is increased if the sub-units are not working effectively together. Management structures were found to sometimes hinder efforts to mitigate such risk, adding structural complexity through matrix management approaches, or artificially fragmenting services by promoting a 'silo' mentality. Effective collaboration was seen to be possible only through the efforts, commitment and goodwill of individuals in overcoming such organisational obstacles.

- ***Capacity***
  Capacity and resourcing issues were frequently cited by participants as underlying causes of tensions in their working relationships with professional services staff, with the negative implications of staff turnover and absence a particular issue. Recognising these challenges, participants appreciated that when individuals were not able to deliver services which met expectations, it was often because they were over-stretched and services were under-resourced, and they were therefore more forgiving of service deficiencies.

- ***Turnover and retention***
  Issues concerning staff retention of valued professional service colleagues were also flagged, as these compounded capacity issues through a loss of institutional knowledge and memory. Staff turnover also meant continual reinvestment in developing interpersonal relationships, which then reduced exchange efficiency over time. One participant had had four changes of business partner in the space of three years in both critical HR and finance functions, resulting in reticence in investing in such relationships in future.

- ***Service delivery models***
  Participants at all three sites highlighted the service delivery model as a feature in their negative service experiences. In particular, the use of resource accounts as a means of handling enquiries to a service was viewed unfavourably in Sites A and B, whereas at Site C the introduction of online portals drew similar commentary. These approaches to service delivery were experienced as 'faceless', anonymous and unsympathetic to customer needs, and were viewed as barriers to accessing support as the opportunity for personal interaction was removed. This was experienced as reducing the service exchange interaction to a transaction between two automatons, dehumanising both the customer and the provider. On the other hand, the business partner model, where staff had a named contact in major professional services such

as HR and finance who could then provide tailored support and frequent, regular interaction was viewed much more positively. Both customer and provider gained value from a better grasp of the pressures and priorities of their colleagues, and this allowed them to develop a deeper shared understanding and co-operate more effectively.

- ***Co-location***
  Co-location was viewed as a beneficial service characteristic in several cases, because of the opportunities it provides for social interaction and deeper engagement with business issues which foster understanding and ownership of the customer's concerns. Co-location was seen as the acceptable face of centralisation, where the service could be controlled centrally but was locally delivered and responsive to the customer's needs.

- ***Tensions between staff groups***
  Participants reflected on the interdependent and symbiotic nature of relationships between academic and professional services staff, but were also clear that the purpose of professional services is to support the academy, and this point was made by both academic and non-academic participants. It was suggested that the interdependency itself could sometimes result in role confusion, with the role of customer and provider becoming muddled. Participants recognised that different priorities and drivers affected the ability of the two staff groups to work together effectively, but that strong working relationships could foster shared interests and mutual understanding, so that each party achieves its objectives.

  Non-academic participants who worked in academic departments sometimes felt caught in the middle between centralised professional support services and local academic colleagues where there were conflicting agendas, and felt that their loyalties could be called into question by both sides. At the same time these staff were better positioned to bridge the tensions between staff groups as they had the know-how and language of both groups to draw on to develop trusting, productive relationships.

4.2 Interpersonal factors influencing relationship quality

Working relationships develop through necessity, proximity and regular interactions, and can be shaped by the organisational factors outlined above. This study also analysed the interpersonal factors which contributed to the development of strong relationships between colleagues, and examined how these could affect perceptions of service quality.

- ***Recognition of shared interests***
  Shared interests and values were identified by participants as important factors in their positive relationship experiences, particularly when these were collaborative in nature. The alignment of goals and agendas, such as improving the student experience, were crucial in participants' sense of working as a wider team, and in achieving the mutually-beneficial desired result.

- ***Personal connection***
  The personal connection is a key characteristic and was cited frequently as the reason for a positive working relationship. Examples given ranged from seeing the service provider as a fellow human being as opposed to a faceless system, to developing a personal relationship and forming strong, lasting friendship bonds. Such bonds facilitated trust development, mutual understanding, collaborative behaviours and the granting of favours.

- ***Communication***
  Strongly rooted in trusting relationships, honesty and openness in communications with colleagues signified for participants a positive regard for the other person, and facilitated more productive interactions as a result. The ease of communication with known individuals produces to exchange efficiency, saving time and effort for both parties.

- ***Personality***
  In a large number of examples of negative relationship experiences, participants cited personality as the root cause. Relationship difficulties were attributed to clashes in personalities, mismatches of personality types, incompatible senses of humour, and different preferences for ways of working. The individual service provider and the resulting relationship was seen as the cause, rather than any structural or organisational flaws.

4.3 The interpersonal relationship and service quality

Five major themes were identified in which the strength of the relationship between professional services staff and the colleagues they served had significant implications for perceptions of service quality.

- ***Competence, efficacy and performance:***
  The specialist knowledge, skills and experience of professional support staff provided the foundation for the working relationship, allowing trust to develop as staff demonstrated their competence. Competence in both technical and interpersonal skills was valued, as participants recognised the benefits they received from service providers both in terms of the support they received and the way in which it was provided. Where service providers were noted to be competent, participants remarked on the positive effects for their ability to do their own jobs effectively. Where service providers did not have the skills or knowledge needed, participants engaged in trouble-shooting, double-checking information received, escalating to senior managers and losing confidence in the service to the extent that they did the work themselves, found alternative providers or went without support. The quality of internal service provision was found to directly affect the quality of performance and service to external customers such as students and funders.

- ***Bureaucracy, rules and discretion:***
  There was a strong appreciation of the need for bureaucracy and efficient processes, but these were only supported when they ‘made sense’. Professional staff were

valued when they used their specialist skills and expertise to protect academic staff from administrative and bureaucratic tasks which would otherwise fall to academics, navigate institutional processes and regulations, and smooth the way in bureaucratically managed exercises such as course approval and academic partnership development. Some participants claimed that professional services staff hid behind the rules, and used them as an excuse not to have to engage in debate with academic colleagues. Several academic participants noted that professional services staff who designed policies and processes did not have sufficient understanding of the academic context and needs of academic departments to frame them appropriately.

The use of discretion on the part of the service provider signalled a positive disposition towards the customer, with the willingness to be flexible understood as a recognition of the human consequences of bureaucratic decisions. Many of the negative examples drew on experiences where professional services staff had applied the rules blindly and without 'human intelligence' or interest in the consequences of their decisions. Where discretion was not forthcoming, participants felt that they were not trusted by their colleagues to act in the interests of the university, and that they were disempowered as a result. This tension was particularly encountered where issues of centralisation were a feature of the provider / customer interaction, and where strained relationships between central and local parts of the university pivoted on the location of decision-making authority and control.

- ***Ownership, problem resolution and engagement:***
  Participants expected their professional services colleagues to take responsibility for tasks in their areas of expertise, to 'own' the issues presented to them, and to liaise with other colleagues in order to deliver effective solutions and save the customer time and effort. Where experiences were less positive, participants cited instances of being 'passed from pillar to post', leading to frustration and annoyance. The way in which professional service colleagues approached problem resolution was seen by participants as a demonstration of their acceptance of ownership and their commitment to using their professional skills and expertise in the interests of the customer.

  Participants welcomed providers who fully engaged with the issue at hand, based their responses on a good understanding of the needs and priorities of the customer, and operated with pragmatic, constructive approaches. Particularly positive examples cited an ability to engage with both operational and strategic priorities, employing creativity and professional insights to anticipate implications, plan ahead and maintain focus on desired outcomes. Such examples converted potentially draining and difficult situations into positive, energising experiences. High levels of staff engagement were linked to stronger interpersonal relationships between colleagues and better service quality.

- ***Mutuality and reciprocity:***
  Reciprocity, mutuality and shared understanding are evidenced in this study as particularly significant elements of effective and dynamic working relationships, which

foster long-term, ongoing, productive collaborations between colleagues. This was especially apparent in the highly interdependent context of a university. As customers, participants expected their service colleagues to understand their business and its context, but they saw a need themselves to understand the pressures on their providers so that they could frame their requests appropriately and manage their expectations. The development of mutual understanding helped to reduce tensions and identify common ground when one part of the university appeared to be pitched against another as a result of competing priorities.

Reciprocity provided the basis for co-operation and collaborative partnerships between different parts of the university's structure, and the resulting relationships promoted trust and goodwill between colleagues in a virtuous circle of reciprocal behaviours.

- ***Value co-creation, co-operation and collaboration:***
  Relationship quality plays a significant role in fostering conducive conditions for co-operation between colleagues and the creation of value for the individual and the organisation. The generation of ideas, innovative and adaptive approaches, and creative solutions to problems were all cited as outcomes of collaborative ways of working. Participants noted that they were able to achieve objectives in collaboration with colleagues which they could not have done alone, and frequently referred to complimentary skillsets and feelings of empowerment resulting from the pooling of resources with their colleagues.

  Collaborations grounded in trusted relationships enabled each party to contribute their full range of skills, knowledge and experience, to share concerns and risks openly and to engage fully across departmental boundaries. The value derived from such relationships was experienced at an individual level such as in personal efficacy, motivation and productivity, and at an organisational level such as in research funding success and improvements in the student experience. Where trust was absent or compromised, participants felt less able to engage in collaborative behaviours and less willing to take risks in sharing knowledge and airing concerns, reducing opportunities for value co-creation.

4.4 Benefits of strong relationships

High quality relationships generated value co-creation and learning opportunities, fostered trust, provided a source of valued advice and counsel, and were reciprocal in nature. Some of the most compelling examples cited combined a number of these elements to deliver significant benefits for the customer and the institution. Participants discussed their experiences of collaborative working relationships and their ability to achieve better results through the combination of the skillset of the provider with their own as customer.

- ***Trust***
  As an outcome of mutual understanding and of prior experience of productive working relationships, trust sustained long-term relationships and promoted exchange efficiency. This allowed participants to act more decisively and effectively

in their own roles because they had confidence in the support, motivations and expertise of their colleagues.

- ***Access to advice***
  Strong, trusting relationships enabled participants to seek expert advice more readily and expose themselves to the reputational risk inherent in asking for help. Several participants noted that access to valued advice had become possible once a positive working relationship had been established, and that without such a bond they would not have felt able to ask the questions they needed to.

- ***Reciprocity***
  The granting of favours, goodwill and going the extra mile for colleagues as reciprocal behaviours were cited as outcomes of positive relationships, with participants recognising the cycle of investment and return in productive exchange relationships.

- ***Organisational citizenship***
  Positive working relationships generated organisational citizenship behaviours as well as reciprocity towards individuals, in that participants referred to helping on interview panels, contributing to pilot studies for new services, and involvement in strategy development and departmental reviews in other parts of the institution, as a result of co-operative relationships established through service exchange experiences and a sense of being connected to the wider community.

- ***Performance***
  High quality relationships with services increased participants' sense of personal efficacy and empowerment, with an ability to perform better in their own roles and responsibilities, and efficiency such that more time could be spent on other priorities as a result. Participants also recorded the benefits of positive working relationships on their external contacts, with examples covering student recruitment and research funding bodies, where successful interactions yielded both financial and reputational results.

4.5 Costs of poor relationships

Whilst the majority of negative consequences were felt in the internal operation and resourcing of the institution, the data also evidences some circumstances where service failings had had financial consequences and external customers had been affected. Findings also indicate that the absence of an interpersonal relationship could in some cases produce the same consequences as the presence of a poor relationship, such as in situations where the service model precludes person-to-person interaction.

- ***Staff welfare and motivation***
  By far the largest effect of poor relationships on participants was emotional. They reported negative emotions such as frustration, anger, disappointment, resentment, irritation, misery, disenchantment, and a sense of disempowerment. In some cases these emotional responses led to raised stress levels which had detrimental effects

on health and wellbeing for those participants. The most frequently cited response to negative working relationships was assertiveness, and participants felt that their personal resilience was tested at such times. Many felt resentful that they were being driven to use these behaviours when it was not their personal style, and felt that they had to compromise their own authenticity in order to achieve desired results.

Such effects on an individual's emotional state of mind were also linked to lower levels of trust between colleagues and reduced tolerance of service failings. Participants expressed their exasperation with poor relationships as 'banging your head against a brick wall', and found such interactions exhausting and demotivating on a personal level, as well as frustrating professionally. When negative experiences of this nature were encountered as a regular feature in their working life, participants spoke about being demoralised and their commitment to the institution was affected as a result.

- ***Impact on innovation***
  Academic participants emphasised detrimental effects on innovation, in that regularly encountering difficult relationships had a dampening effect on creativity. In a university setting which demands innovation in research, scholarship and student experience, a sense of being compromised in these areas was especially worrying to these participants.

- ***Productivity and value for money***
  Participants described actions they had taken as a result of negative service experiences, and these included avoidance of services, finding alterative means, escalating issues to senior management, and doing the work themselves because it was easier than asking for help. The impact of such actions on participants' own productivity included increased workload particularly for academic colleagues, and reduced levels of personal efficacy, a factor felt keenly by non-academic participants who pride themselves on getting things done. For example, one participant claimed that around 60% of her time was spent chasing up after poor support, and that the drain on her time and energy had significant impact on her ability to do her job. Non-academic participants mentioned escalation more frequently, perhaps as a consequence of their status within the institution and their greater reliance on chains of command through their Head of Department.

  The outcomes described above had consequences for the value for money of internal service provision: if an institution is funding an internal service which staff are avoiding then this is not cost-effective. If senior managers are required to resolve service issues which have been escalated to them on a regular basis there is a cost to the institution in terms of management time and resource.

- ***Financial implications***
  Examples were provided where reductions in student intake were directly attributed by the participants to centralised student recruitment services which had failed to engage with external customers appropriately. The implications of reduced student numbers were experienced at departmental level, with one Head of Department

concerned that staff redundancies in the school would need to take place as a result of the reduced fee income. What irked such participants most was the lack of accountability for the consequences of service failings, and the absence of tangible consequences for the services which were responsible. As Heads of Department, they saw themselves as being held personally accountable for the financial consequences of service failings which were outside their control, a situation which they found unacceptable.

5. Application of findings in practice

Relationships and interpersonal exchanges can be difficult to measure in practice, and their impact can be intangible and hard to quantify in the workplace, leading to a preference by managers to focus on more tangible elements of service delivery and performance. This research purposely provides empirical evidence to redress this balance, illustrating the tangible consequences of internal exchange relationships such that their contribution to individual and organisational performance can be better appreciated. The implications outlined below are grounded in the research evidence of this study; however it is noted that findings may not all be applicable to all English universities, and that some aspects will resonate more strongly in certain situations than in others.

5.1 Implications for Higher Education managers

Centralisation

Centralisation was a prevailing theme in the background of working relationships with university professional services staff, as institutional approaches to the organisation of departments and services were seen to drive the allocation of resources and service delivery models on campus. Differing views between the senior management and departmental leaders about the extent to which services ought to be centralised were frequently expressed, and lay behind descriptions of tensions around power and control in the system. Co-location as a service model was viewed as a useful compromise position, which enabled centralised services to have stronger connections with and understanding of the needs of the departments they served. When explicitly discussed, participants were actually more exercised about the effects of centralisation and its unintended consequences, than the principle of centralisation itself.

The findings imply that if sufficient attention is given to employing mechanisms to address the negative consequences, then less energy would be spent in contesting or subverting centralised structures. Specifically, the two key areas of concern which emerged from this study are (1) Consultation and the voice of the customer, and (2) the misalignment of control and accountability.

Firstly, this study implies that in centralised services particular efforts should be made to actively seek to understand the needs of the customer on a continual and genuine basis, and to consciously build these into service design decisions. Co-location can increase such opportunities and enhance the process, but if it is not a viable option, then it should be recognised that separation of the service provider from the point of service delivery will require providers to take additional measures to understand customer needs.

Secondly, the greatest concern was that centralised services controlled the allocation of resources and the ways in which they were used, but that the consequences of these decisions were experienced at departmental level, and that it was departments which were held accountable for the effects of service failings when they were not able to control the inputs. The development of mechanisms to evaluate service quality and to hold centralised services to account for the consequences of poor service quality would be welcomed and provide a means to address such tensions and perceptions of inequity.

Service delivery models

This study also uncovered participants' unease with service models which excluded the possibility of developing exchange relationships with individuals, and highlighted the exchange inefficiencies which could ensue, as well as the lost potential for value co-creation processes to emerge. Whilst resource accounts and online portals are likely to continue to be a feature of mass service delivery models, the findings from this study imply that greater attention should be given to removing anonymity within these approaches and to recognising the human need to establish a personal connection and rapport with colleagues from whom they are requesting help. In evaluating service quality and designing service delivery models, service leaders should consider the implications for service exchange relationships which this research has shown can have tangible outcomes for business efficiency, staff motivation and value for money. Business cases for service provision would be more realistic if the implications of service decisions on effective co-operation between colleagues were recognised and taken into account, to avoid unintended negative consequences which affect service outcomes.

Effects of service constraints

Another key theme for HE managers and those with responsibility for professional services functions is leadership. Specifically, the leadership of professional services on campus requires informed decision-making about the best use of limited resources in order to provide maximum capacity, and it was the issue of capacity that was one of the most frequently identified reasons for service failings by participants in this study. Consequences of lack of capacity to support academic functions include poor value for money, inefficiency, lost opportunities for income generation and more expensive staff spending time on lower level administrative tasks which divert them away from their own tasks. These findings imply that service leaders should consider the outcomes of service constraints from the customer perspective, as it may be that service decisions and budget restrictions are leading to false economies at institutional level, and there may be a stronger business case for increased resource if this can be demonstrated to improve cost effectiveness.

Effects on performance and productivity

In addition to issues of value for money, HE managers are encouraged to learn the lessons from this study in terms of the effects of internal service quality issues on staff productivity and performance. When service providers and customers work co-operatively together to pool resources and collectively solve problems, the value created for the individuals and institution is tangible and motivational for all involved, leading to further opportunities for innovation and performance improvement. Conversely, by far the most frequently cited consequence of poor service exchange relationships was sheer frustration which stymied progress, sapped morale and squandered goodwill. The findings of this research imply that organisations experiencing such negative outcomes on a repeated or regular basis will find it harder to respond to challenges and problems, as staff will be demotivated, disengaged and lack the networks of co-operative relationships required to pull together in difficult times. The logic in encouraging staff to invest in their working relationships for the benefit of their own job satisfaction and performance as well as that of the institution is therefore clear.

Leadership in professional services

The role of the service leader was also recognised by participants as being significant in instilling competence, professionalism and a customer service culture within their service

delivery team. The findings of this study provide evidence of the importance of interpersonal skills and relationship-building approaches by professional services staff as contributors to service quality, and therefore service leaders would be benefit from developing these capabilities within their teams, as well as explicitly recognising the value of staff working in these ways. Recruitment, selection and career progression processes should be designed to enable assessment of aptitudes and capabilities of candidates in these areas, and reward such behaviours to encourage appreciation of their importance.

5.2 Implications for Higher Education professional services staff

Understanding the customer

Whilst this study gathered data from customers of professional services and therefore presented a perspective from only one side of the service exchange relationship, the findings provide insights into the expectations and experiences of customers which can help service providers to understand the implications of service delivery decisions for those they aim to help. Whether or not expectations are reasonable, understanding the customer's needs and values and identifying mutual interests and shared goals will enable dialogue between the two parties to establish co-operative relationships based on trust and mutual respect. Service quality can then emerge from the management of expectations which ensure customer satisfaction, and through the recognition of the role of the customer in value co-creation processes. If the customer's perspective is not valued and the customer not involved in service decisions, then service quality will likely fall short of expectations.

Investing in relationships

The research findings indicate the significance of a personal connection between service provider and customer which can be fostered through open and honest communication. This implies that investing in the service exchange relationship is an investment worth making because of the intangible benefits this can bring in the long term, including exchange efficiency, perceptions of performance and service quality, increased tolerance of service constraints, and an enhanced personal network. Co-location within an academic department was recommended by participants as a route towards developing strong working relationships and shared understandings between academic and professional services staff, but investing time in relationship-building and visiting the academic setting in person may achieve the same thing if co-location is not feasible.

Professional services staff may also consider a secondment to an academic department as a means to broaden their experience and perspective of academic life, and colleagues who had such career experience were recognised as being able to better manage the inherent tensions and conflicting priorities between academic and non-academic staff, and between the central university and the local departmental needs, because they could 'speak the language' of each setting.

The value of professional services colleagues

The study demonstrated the qualities which customers valued most in their professional service colleagues, including professional competence, responsiveness and reliability. Alongside these, one of the key behavioural traits which participants valued above all was the use of initiative and problem solving skills, and taking ownership of problems and seeing

them through to resolution on behalf of the customer. Recognising that universities are complex bureaucratic structures, the value of a colleague who can take responsibility for navigating through the institutional policies and processes was very much appreciated. These findings provide some insights for professional services staff as to the importance of certain skills, experience and behaviours for their performance and career progression.

Attitudes and behaviours

The way in which professional services staff frame their role in relation to those they serve signalled their outlook and behaviours towards their customers. Participants valued professional service colleagues when they helped to steer a course through university processes and took on the role of dealing with organisational complexities, shielding their colleagues from bureaucracy and unnecessary administration. On the other hand, when exchange relationships with professional service colleagues faltered, participants frequently cited support colleagues' unhelpful approaches towards rules and regulations and were frustrated by the 'computer-says-no' attitude which made no attempt to problem solve or understand the customer's perspective. Examples were given of differing attitudes in the same services (for instance, procurement and finance), underlining that it is not the nature of the service which determines the approach taken, but the behaviours and attitudes of the individual service colleague.

The implication of these findings is that professional service colleagues can decide individually whether to act in a policing or in an enabling, more facilitative manner. A policing approach is likely to forgo the value co-creation benefits of positive working relationships, whilst the enabling approach will lead to trusting, co-operative relationships. In both approaches, rules may be applied and compliance maintained to the same extent, but it is the manner of their application which will determine the outcome of the exchange.

6. Conclusion

In presenting this research and the empirical evidence of the experiences and consequences of working relationships with professional services staff, a deeper understanding of the value and contribution – and potential contribution – of professional services staff on campus is gained, which goes beyond anecdote and institutional narrative.

Relationships founded on trust, communication and the recognition of shared values and interests are critical in allowing the contribution of these staff to be maximised, and for effective co-operative relationships to emerge which drive enhanced performance and progress towards strategic priorities for the institution. If such relationships are nurtured and valued, a university's investment in professional services can make an appreciable positive difference to the working lives of academic and non-academic staff alike, yielding practical, social and psychological benefits which increase performance and make the university a more successful and rewarding place to work.

Throughout the interactions with participants involved in this study, whether with academic or professional services staff, what emerged in common across all three sites was a tangible sense of pride in their work and their workplace relationships, and a will to see improvements in areas which were perceived to be underperforming. Any gripes expressed stemmed from the knowledge that things could and should be done better, and from expectations of professionalism which set high standards of performance and behaviour.

Participants were committed to resolving issues because they believed that this would benefit the university and themselves in equal measure, and allow both to be more successful and productive in future. Such staff attitudes are encouraging in that they provide the necessary foundations for universities to foster successful internal collaboration and a common sense of commitment and ownership which can unite staff across departmental and occupational divides and produce valuable benefits for all.

Appendix 12: List of peer reviewed publications

Gibbs, T. and Kharouf, H. (2017) *Poor Relations? The work relationships of university professional services staff*. 'British Academy of Management National Conference'. held 5-7 September 2017 at the University of Warwick

Gibbs, T. and Kharouf, H. (2018) *Running on Goodwill? Relationship quality and service outcomes in university professional services.* 'SRHE International Conference on Research into Higher Education'. held 5-7 December 2018 at Celtic Manor

Gibbs, T. (2020) 'Running on Goodwill: The value of co-operative relationships at work'. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education* (forthcoming)